CITY HILIGHTS

The Truth Speaks

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INDIA AT CENTRE STAGE?

Modi calls for peace on call with Trump

US President Donald Trump calls up Prime Minister Modi to discuss West Asia situation; India pushes for de-escalation & stability, ensuring that the Strait of Hormuz remains open, secure and accessible, which is essential for the whole world; they agree to stay in touch in this efforts.

NEW DELHI

US President Donald Trump on Tuesday held a telephonic conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi about the Middle East conflict as well as the Strait of Hormuz, the US ambassador to India said Tuesday.

Trump and Modi discussed the "ongoing situation" in the Middle East, including the "importance of keeping the Strait of Hormuz open," Sergio Gor wrote on US social media company X.

In an X post, Modi said "Received a call from President Trump and had a useful exchange of views on the situation in West Asia.

"India supports de-escalation and restoration of peace at the earliest. Ensuring that the Strait of Hormuz remains open, secure and accessible is essential for the whole world. We agreed to stay in touch regarding efforts towards peace and stability," the Indian prime minister said on X.

The regional escalation in the Middle East has continued since the US and Israel launched a joint offensive on Iran on Feb. 28, so far killing over 1,340 people, including then-Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Iran has retaliated with repeated drone and missile strikes targeting Israel and Gulf countries hosting US military assets.

The Strait of Hormuz has also been effectively throttled since early March. Around 20 million barrels of oil normally pass through it daily, and its disruption has driven up shipping costs and pushed global oil prices higher.

On Monday, Trump said he ordered a five-day postponement of all strikes on Iranian power plants and energy infrastructure, citing "very good and productive" talks with Tehran. But Iranian officials denied any talks had taken place for weeks.

'Whose side are we on? We stand with India': PM Modi

People often ask, 'Whose side are we on?' My answer is, 'We stand with India. We stand with India's interests. We stand with peace and dialogue.

—Narendra Modi, PM

In touch with Gulf, Iran, Israel, US over crisis: PM

In the Rajya Sabha, PM Narendra Modi said on Tuesday, "I have spoken to the Heads of States of most of the West Asian countries twice. We are in continuous communication with all Gulf countries.

We are also in communication with Iran, Israel and US. Our goal is the reinstatement of peace in the region through dialogue and diplomacy. We have also spoken to them about de-escalation and the opening of Strait of Hormuz. Attacks on commercial ships and obstruction in an international sea route like the Strait of Hormuz is unacceptable. India has opposed attacks on civilians, civil infrastructure, and infrastructure related to energy and transport. India is making continuous efforts for the safe passage of Indian ships even in these times of war. For a solution to this crisis, India has suggested dialogue. Threat on anyone's life in this war is not in the interest of humankind. So, India's efforts have been to encourage all parties for peaceful solutions."

'Over 3,75,000 Indians have safely returned to India to date'

"In this situation of crisis, the safety of Indians around the world is of the utmost priority for us. More than 3,75,000 Indians have safely returned to India to date. More than 1000 Indians have returned from Iran alone; of these, more than 700 are medical students. In this hour of crisis, our Govt is working with full sensitivity. All countries have assured the safety of Indians there. However, it is unfortunate that a few Indians died and a few others were injured in the attacks. Affected families are being given all necessary help. Quality treatment of the injured is being ensured," PM Narendra Modi said in Rajya Sabha.

Bitumen crunch halts road work in Bengaluru

Bengaluru

Road work in Bengaluru has come to a standstill due to a shortage of bitumen, caused by the ongoing war in West Asia. The city's construction projects, worth thousands of crores, are facing a major hurdle as 80% of bitumen used in road construction is imported from West Asia. With the war disrupting supplies, prices have skyrocketed from Rs 46,000 per tonne to Rs 68,000, a 45 per cent hike. Contractors are struggling to cope with the price hike.

Modi a potential key 'mediator'?

The war in Western Asia shows no signs of ending. The US, Israel, and Iran do not seem to be in a mood to negotiate. Amid this, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is emerging as a potential key 'mediator' in the Iran-Israel crisis, supported by his strong, balanced diplomatic ties with involved parties. Following discussions with US President Donald Trump, India is pushing for de-escalation in West Asia, prioritizing the safety of Indian citizens and the security of commercial shipping lanes.

Based on reports as of March 24, 2026, amid the escalating Iran-Israel-US conflict, multiple countries and regional observers have recognized Prime Minister Narendra Modi's potential as a mediator due to India's neutral stance and strong ties with all parties involved.

INDIVIDUAL VOICES & EXPERT CALLS

- A retired US military official Colonel Douglas MacGregor argued that PM Modi could act as an effective intermediary. "To stop the US-Israel-Iran war, we need an intermediary, and preferably, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi," he said in a podcast. MacGregor is an influential voice in America's political circles.
- Before MacGregor, it was the UAE's former envoy to India, Hussain Hassan Mirza, who suggested that PM Modi was the best person to help end the war. "A single call from PM Modi to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Iranian leaders can stop the war," said Mirza, citing his potential to act as a decisive mediator.

DIPLOMATIC OUTREACH

PM Modi has engaged in high-level discussions with leaders of at least five countries—France, Malaysia, Oman, Jordan, and Qatar—to discuss the conflict and encourage de-escalation. He has also held talks with the President of Iran and U.S. President Donald Trump

REGIONAL CONTEXT

While reports suggest several countries are involved in back-channel talks (including Turkey, Qatar, and Egypt), and Pakistan has offered to host talks, PM Modi has focused on high-level diplomacy with all parties to ensure the safety of Indians and keep the Strait of Hormuz open.

All-party meeting on Mideast crisis today

NEW DELHI

The Government of India has called for an all-party meeting at 5 pm on March 25 on the West Asia crisis.

This comes after Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the parliament on Monday, where he termed the conflict "worrisome". He highlighted that the ongoing conflict poses "unprecedented challenges" that are not only economic and related to national security but also humanitarian.

Earlier on Tuesday, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh chaired a review meeting in light of recent global and regional security developments and to assess India's defence preparedness.

Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, Air Chief Marshal Amar Preet Singh, General Upendra Dwivedi, Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi, Defence Research and Development Organisation Chairman Samir Kamat, and others attended the meeting.

The conflict in West Asia has entered its fourth week, disrupting trade routes through the Strait of Hormuz.

The war, triggered by US-Israeli strikes on Iran, has entered its fourth week, disrupting trade routes through the Strait of Hormuz and impacting global energy markets and economic stability.

LS passes Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026 amid stir

NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Tuesday passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill amid opposition from transgender rights groups and Opposition.

Trans rights activists have termed as regressive the proposed Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, warning that it could undermine the identity, dignity and equality of such people.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill was introduced by Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Virendra Kumar on Friday. The proposed amendment has triggered criticism from members of the community who say it departs from principles laid down by the Supreme Court in the landmark National Legal Services Authority vs Union of India.

The bill seeking to give a precise definition of the term "transgender" and provide graded punishments that reflect the gravity of the harm inflicted upon such persons was introduced in the Lok Sabha earlier this month.

The bill underlines that a transgender person "shall not include, nor shall ever have been so included, persons with different sexual orientations and self-perceived sexual identities". The Bill notes that it is imperative to give a precise definition for proper and definitive identification and protection of transgender persons, to whom the benefits of the present law must reach.

The protection and benefits that are provided under the present 2019 law are vast in nature and, therefore, care has to be taken that "such identification cannot be extended based on any acquirable characteristics or personal choice or claimed self-perceived identity of an individual". The bill also contains provisions for "designation of an authority" which will have the option to seek "expert advice" if required.

WHAT IS THE LAW?

Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019

- Passed by Parliament in 2019
- Aims to protect rights and dignity of transgender persons
- **Prohibits discrimination in:**
  - Education
  - Employment
  - Healthcare
  - Public services

KEY PROPOSED CHANGE

Removal of Self-Perceived Gender Identity

- Amendment proposes removal of Section 4(2)
- This section guarantees the right to self-perceived gender identity
- Critics say this right was central to the 2019 Act

NEW DEFINITION OF TRANSGENDER

Revised Definition Proposed

The Bill defines transgender persons as those:

- With socio-cultural identities such as hijra, kinner, aravani, jogta
- People with intersex variations
- Individuals with biological variations in sexual characteristics
- Those forced to assume transgender identity through procedures

CHANGES IN CERTIFICATION

New Role for Medical Authority

- Medical board may verify identity
- District Magistrate to examine recommendations of the authority
- New rule for revised certificate after gender-affirming surgery
- Hospitals must report such procedures to authorities

WHAT THE SUPREME COURT SAID

2014 NALSA Judgment

- Recognised third gender
- Upheld right to self-determination of gender identity
- Said gender identity is part of personal liberty under Article 21

OFFENCES & PUNISHMENT

Stronger Legal Protection

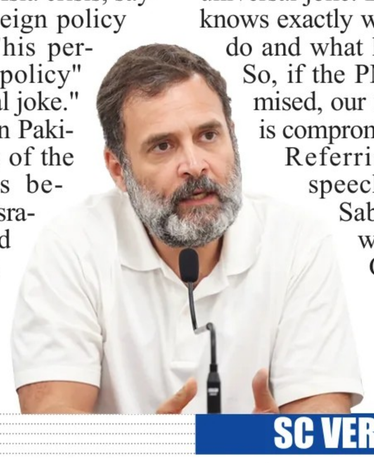
- Expanded section on offences against transgender persons
- **Punishments include:**
  - Rigorous imprisonment
  - Fines up to 5 lakh
  - Severe cases may attract life imprisonment

India's foreign policy 'universal joke': Rahul

NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's over the West Asia crisis, saying India's foreign policy had become "his personal foreign policy" and a "universal joke."

To a query on Pakistan being one of the intermediaries between the US-Israel and Iran, and India's stand on the West Asia crisis, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said, "Our foreign policy is PM Modi's personal foreign policy. You can see the result of this. It's a universal joke. Everybody considers it a universal joke. Donald Trump knows exactly what Modi can do and what he cannot do. So, if the PM is compromised, our foreign policy is compromised."



Referring to PM's speech in the Lok Sabha, where he warned of a COVID-like crisis, Rahul said he (Modi) had forgotten how many people died and the extent of the tragedies that took place during the pandemic. He alleged that the government has no understanding of such issues. "He gave irrelevant speech yesterday (in Lok Sabha). He is India's Prime Minister; it should appear that he is India's PM. There is no position at all. It is sad that the people will suffer, it has just begun. We will face issues concerning LPG, petrol, fertilizer everything... He claims the situation will be like Covid, but he forgot how many people died during Covid and the amount of tragedies that took place," he added.

SC VERDICT

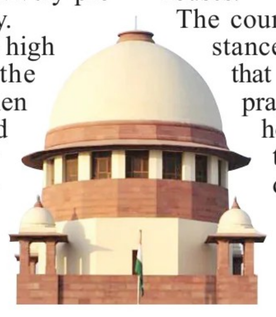
'Conversion beyond Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist faith ends SC status'

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday affirmed the Andhra Pradesh High Court's judgment which stated that an individual who converted to Christianity and actively professed it, cannot continue to be a member of the Scheduled Caste (SC) community.

A bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and Manmohan said, no person who professes a religion other than Hinduism, Sikhism or Buddhism can be regarded as a member of a Scheduled Caste. Conversion to any other religion results in loss of SC status. The apex court had reserved judgment on August 26, 2025 on a petition filed by Chinthada Anand. He had challenged the validity of the High Court's order of April 30, 2025.

It was contended that he had converted to Christianity and acted as a pastor. He had filed a case under the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act against certain persons accusing them of assaulting him. When he claimed protection under the SC&ST Act, the accused persons challenged this, stating that the pastor had converted and was actively professing Christianity.



In April 2025, the high court held that the caste system is alien to Christianity and consequently barred the individual from invoking the provisions of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

The apex court said an individual who converted to Christianity and openly professed and practiced that faith ceased to be a member of the Scheduled Caste community.

The bench noted that the appellant continued to profess Christianity and had functioned as a pastor for over a decade, conducting regular Sunday prayers at village houses.

The court also found substance in the argument that he was conducting prayer meetings at the house at the time of the alleged incident. The bench said that he remained a Christian on the date of the incident.

QUICK READ

Forever in gallery: 11 seats for stampede victims

BENGALURU: The names of the 11 deceased fans, who lost their lives in a stampede during the RBC's maiden IPL victory will be displayed on the screen before the match against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Saturday and players from both teams will pay their respects by observing a minute of silence. It has also been decided to permanently reserve 11 seats in the premium stand of the stadium in honour of the deceased. This area will be marked separately as a sign of respect. Also, those seats will not be sold during any international matches, including the IPL. *More on page 10*

India's first passive euthanasia patient dies

NEW DELHI: Harish Rana, the first person in India to be allowed passive euthanasia, passed away on Tuesday at AIIMS-Delhi after more than 13 years in coma. The 31-year-old was shifted from his Ghaziabad home to the AIIMS on March 14. The Supreme Court in a landmark judgment on March 11 allowed passive euthanasia for Harish, who was a BTech student at Panjab University who fell from a fourth-floor in 2013 and suffered severe head injuries. His nutritional support was gradually withdrawn after hospitalisation. He is survived by his parents, Ashok and Nirmala Rana.

QUICK READ

Beer in hand, tripling, no helmets: 3 docs booked

CH NEWS, BENGALURU
Three doctors, including a woman, celebrating completion of master of science (MS) in orthopaedics, were booked for riding triple on a two-wheeler on a public road. Two of them were without helmet. One of the pillion riders, who was wearing a helmet, was drinking from what looked like a beer bottle while riding in the midst of traffic. Acting suo motu, police registered the FIR for rash or negligent riding on a public way. The incident took place on 16th Main between BTM Layout and Jayadeva Junction. A video of the incident shot by a commuter and uploaded on social media went viral, drawing sharp criticism from netizens.

ELCITA appoints 3 officials to hear RTI pleas

CH NEWS, BENGALURU
Electronics City Industrial Town Authority (ELCITA) appointed a public information officer and two other officials for handling information requests through Right to Information Act, 2005. The move comes after Karnataka Information Commission (KIC) ruled in Jan that the body comes under the ambit of RTI. K Aishwarya has been appointed Public Information Officer (PIO), Maham Kausar and N Aniruddha are Assistant PIO and first appellate officer, respectively. The appointments were made after Karnataka Information Commisioner Rajashekhar S noted that the state government has complete control, financial as well as administrative, over the authority, including the power to supersede it.

Cops raid gambling den in Nelamangala, arrest 5

CH NEWS, BENGALURU
The police have arrested five persons for illegally gambling at Danojipalya in Nelamangala. Based on a tip-off from the locals, the Nelamangala Town police arrested the gang for gambling illegally. The arrested have been identified as Yathish of the Excise Department, Ravi Kumar, Hanumantha Raju, Rangaswamy and Krishna. During the raids, the police seized more than Rs 2 lakh in betting money. Mobile phones and bikes were also seized. Interestingly, the gambling was taking place near the house of the woman head constable. A case has been registered at Nelamangala Town police station.

Govt mandates CCTV cameras, GPS tracking to plug PDS leaks

Food Minister KH Muniyappa said it has been decided to install CCTV cameras in ration shops and warehouses, and install GPS on vehicles transporting foodgrains.

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

The state government has announced that steps have been taken to install CCTV cameras in all ration shops in the state to ensure transparent supply of rice being provided under the Anna Bhagya scheme and to control the sale of rice in bulk.

Anna Bhagya rice is being sold in black markets without any restrictions. Rice that should be available to the poor is going to rice mills. The rule that ration trucks should be yellow in color is not being followed. Therefore, Legislative Council member TA Saravana urged the government to install CCTV and GPS trackers.

Responding to this, Food Minister KH Muniyappa said that it has been decided to install CCTV in 20,000 fair price shops and warehouses. Similarly, it has been decided to install GPS trackers in vehicles transporting rations. A master control room needs to be set up to monitor the CCTV and GPS trackers. He said that a tender has been called to complete these three processes and the tender will be finalized soon.

When BJP's MP Kushalappa urged the government to allow farmers in Kodagu to keep wildlife items with them, saying wildlife items are an important part of their festival, Khandre gave this reply.

He said that it is a central law that wildlife organs and trophies should be given to the government. Only the central government has the power to amend the Wildlife (Protection) Act-1972, which refers to this. The state does not have the power.

The state government had ordered on January 10, 2024, to hand over wildlife items to the Forest Department and given a period of 90 days. The minister informed that during this period, 192 people have submitted 705 wildlife organs and trophies to the government.

I have met the Union Minister twice and requested him to allow the farmers and cultivators of the Malnad region to keep their heritage items with them. Your government is at the Centre. You too come, I am ready to go with you and meet the Union Minister for the third time, said Forest and Biological Sciences Minister Ishwar Khandre.

Over 1K people killed in pvt bus accidents in state in 6 years

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

According to the transport department, 3,823 accidents were reported during this period, largely attributed to driver negligence, technical faults, and violations of road safety norms.

The situation has worsened significantly, with the number of accidents more than doubling from 335 in 2020 to 847 in 2025. Fatalities increased from 114 to 253 over the same period, while the number of injured surged from 675 to 1,803.

Despite no significant increase in the number of vehicles inspected, the number of violations detected has risen sharply. Responding to questions raised by MLC D Arun on action taken against errant private operators, Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy said that in 2020-21, Regional Transport Offices (RTOs) inspected 23,086 vehicles and booked 3,922 cases. In contrast, in the current financial year so far, 20,289 vehicles have been inspected, but as many as 11,165 cases registered, more than double the violations recorded six years ago.

Following a series of fire incidents involving sleeper coach buses, the state government has set March 31 as the deadline for private operators to comply with enhanced safety norms. Officials said strict directions have been issued to private bus operators and bus body builders to adhere to prescribed standards aimed at improving passenger safety.

As part of the revised guidelines, partition doors behind the driver's cabin must be removed, as they can obstruct evacuation through the front exit during emergencies. The use of berth sliders in air-conditioned sleeper buses has also been prohibited, with officials citing safety risks associated with manual sliding mechanisms used in place of curtains. The department has mandated a minimum of four emergency exits in 12-metre buses and at least five in buses exceeding 12 metres in length. Installation of fire extinguishers has been made compulsory across all such vehicles. Transporting commercial goods in passenger buses has also been strictly prohibited.

Norms to follow

Officials said the measures are in line with directions from the National Human Rights Commission, which called on states to implement recommendations from a safety study conducted by the Central Institute of Road Transport. Fitness certificates (FCs) will not be issued to buses that fail to comply with the new safety requirements.

Min blasts officials for letting untreated sewage flow into lakes

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

Amid mounting criticism over the quality of treated water supplied to Kolar and Chikkaballapur under the ambitious KC Valley Project, and a recent bandh in Chikkaballapur by farmers demanding tertiary treated water, Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda pulled up municipal authorities for allowing untreated sewage to flow into lakes, warning that such lapses are damaging the credibility of the flagship initiative.

At a review meeting with experts from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) along with Minor Irrigation Minister NS Boseraju, Food and Civil Supplies Minister KH Muniyappa and Chikkaballapur in-charge Minister MC Sudhakar, the Minister cited long-term scientific assessments to counter allegations about water quality. It is not just one or two years. Over the past six years, IISc has been consistently monitoring water quality, and tests have revealed no such concerns.

Neither in surface water nor groundwater samples has any metal residue been found, he said. However, Gowda pointed to a critical flaw, unchecked discharge of untreated sewage by local urban bodies, which, he said, is contaminating otherwise treated water. Such negligence by local officials is not only polluting water bodies but also damaging the credibility of the project. The mistakes of municipal authorities are tarnishing the very purpose of the KC Valley initiative, he said, cautioning that years of positive outcomes could be undermined by poor governance.

Highlighting the situation in Chikkaballapur, the Minister said, good quality water is being polluted by the discharge of untreated sewage from urban pockets. The sewage of Chikkaballapur town is directly let into these water bodies. He called for legal action against officials responsible for the same.

State tops GST growth rate, lags Maha in collection: Min

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

Karnataka has recorded the highest growth rate in GST (Goods and Services Tax) collections among major states for till date during 2025-26, but lags Maharashtra in overall revenue, state Revenue Minister Krishna Byregowda informed the legislative assembly.

Following a meeting with tax officials, the Minister said Karnataka has logged a growth rate of 11.7 percent between April 2025 and February 2026 in a clear reflection of its robust economy. Byregowda, who represents Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in the GST Council, said Bihar posted a growth rate of 11.4 percent and Maharashtra 8 percent. The Minister clarified that the figures were based on pre-settlement GST data. Prior to settling the IGST, we are at the top with the collection growth rate, he said.

IGST is Integrated Goods and Services Tax levied on all inter-state supplies of goods and services, imports, and exports. Despite leading in growth rate, Karnataka's total GST collections stood at Rs 1.44 lakh crore during the 11-month period, significantly lower than Maharashtra's Rs 3.28 lakh crore. Bihar collected Rs 17,488 crore. Karnataka topped state GST collections, registering a 13.6 percent growth compared to the same period in 2024-25.

Data for March 2026 is yet to be compiled. According to Byregowda, the growth rate could have been higher if not for the rate rationalisation which bogged the state to 11% average growth rate during the fiscal 2025-26.

Intervening during a debate on the state budget 2026-27, BJP MLA V Sunil Kumar criticised the government's guarantee schemes, arguing that increased spending was straining the state's economy. Responding to this, Gowda said there was no direct link between the schemes and the state's economic performance.

LUMOS 2026 Photography Expo at Kristu Jayanti University

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

Photographs are powerful expressions that preserve emotions, document reality, and communicate beyond words, said Fr. Joshy Mathew, Chief Human Resource Officer (CHRO) and Director of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, while inaugurating LUMOS 2026, the photography exhibition organised by the Department of Media Studies at Kristu Jayanti (Deemed to be University).

In his inaugural address, Fr Joshy Mathew highlighted the deeper significance of photography, noting that images are not merely visual records but meaningful narratives that capture fleeting moments and enduring emotions. He stressed that photographers carry a responsibility to observe, interpret, and represent reality with sensitivity and purpose. Encouraging students, he remarked that photography can be a powerful medium to tell stories, raise awareness, and inspire change.

The exhibition showcased a wide array of photographs captured by students and faculty, reflecting creativity, perspective, and technical excellence. The initiative aimed to celebrate photography as an art form while providing a platform for emerging photographers to present their work.

The exhibition witnessed an enthusiastic response, with over 1,000 photograph submissions received. After a careful screening process, around 750 entries were shortlisted and displayed.

The successful execution of LUMOS 2026 reflects the commitment and teamwork of the organising team, making the exhibition a significant platform for creative expression and visual engagement.

Dr AV Gopakumar, Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Dr Aby Augustine, Head of the Department of Media Studies, and Photography Club Secretaries Vishreeta and Mathew were also present.

HC upset over registrar issuing death certificate in name of living person

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

Expressing dissatisfaction over the failure to cancel a death certificate issued in the name of a living person, the High Court directed the Registrar of Births and Deaths of the Greater Bangalore Authority (GBA) to submit a letter of cancellation of the death certificate by the next hearing.

A single-judge bench headed by Justice Sachin Shankar Magadum, which took up the hearing on a petition filed by D Mehboob Basha seeking a direction to cancel the provisional death certificate issued by the Birth and Death Registrar of the Chickpet Zonal Office, gave this instruction and adjourned the hearing.

They are forced to approach the court as the death certificate issued in the name of a living person is not being revoked. The Registrar of Births and Deaths must submit a letter of cancellation of the death certificate by Wednesday. Otherwise, action will be taken against the concerned officials. An order was issued last year to cancel the death certificate issued. The court questioned the government as to why it should not impose a penalty for non-compliance.

The court has issued notices to the Principal Secretary of the Health and Family Welfare Department, the Birth and Death Registrar of the GBA, the Administrative Officer of the Kidwai Memorial Hospital, the Medical Officer of Chickpet, and the Joint Director of the Statistical Department of the GBA.

During the hearing, the counsel for the applicant said that the death certificate was issued even though the applicant was alive. The GBA informed the hospital that his PAN and Aadhaar card were all there. The Aadhaar card was linked to the ration card. Due to this, the applicant was not able to get ration.

Ashoka shows pen drive in assembly to expose colours of corp officials

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

The officials of the Corporation have resorted to racketeering on the pretext of collecting taxes. Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Assembly, R Ashoka alleged that the poor and middle class people who have arrears of property tax are being targeted and extorting money by threatening to auction their houses.

I have evidence that BBMP officials have collected money from many people in the name of e-accounts, he said, pointing to a pen drive in the House.

He alleged that the corporation officials were soft on the HMT factory and were attacking the poor in the name of taxes even though they had not paid taxes. He also demanded an explanation from Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, who is also the Minister in charge of Bengaluru.

FADING FLAMES!

LPG crunch, hoarding puts bajji-bonda shops on edge

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

Hit by a prolonged shortage of commercial LPG cylinders and soaring black-market prices, hundreds of bakeries and condiment shops are now struggling to stay afloat.

While larger hotels have managed to navigate the LPG crunch using limited stock or alternative fuels such as firewood, it is the humble bajji, bonda, and samosa stalls that are bearing the brunt. These stalls run on thin margins. "Without gas, we simply cannot function," said a shop owner in Rajarajeshwari Nagar.

Small condiment shops, serving staples like samosas, gobi manchurian, tea, and coffee depend entirely on commercial LPG cylinders.

Typically, one cylinder lasts around 15 days. But with no fresh supply for over 20 days, many vendors have already shut their shops. Adding to their woes are reports of commercial cylinders being diverted and sold illegally at exorbitant rates, ranging from Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000. far beyond what small vendors can afford. "If there is a shortage, how are cylinders available at Rs 8,000 in the black market," asks a frustrated vendor. "We cannot pay such prices and still run a business."

The frustration spilled onto the streets when scores of shop owners, along with the Karnataka Rajya Karmikara Parishath, staged a protest in Rajarajeshwarinagar demanding cylinder availability. In a symbolic act, they served tea brewed on firewood and distributed buns to highlight their plight, showcasing how they are being forced to turn to outdated and inefficient methods just to stay afloat.

"We managed to get some allocation for hotels after protests earlier, but now small eateries are being ignored," said Ravi Shetty Byndoor, state president of the Association.

QUICK READ

CM inaugurates new western gate of Vidhana Soudha

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday inaugurated the renovated entrance of the Vidhana Soudha on the west side. One of the emblems of the government, Gandaberunda, is decorated on the entrance with a beautifully carved rope tree. Legislative Council Speaker Basavaraj Horatti, Speaker UT Khader and other MLAs and Ministers were present on the occasion. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah honoured Ali Khan, the sculptor who carved the wooden door of the western gate of the Vidhana Soudha, by dressing him in a Mysuru turban and wrapping him in a shawl.

New chariot outfit for Brahmarathotsava

BENGALURU

The city's historic Sri Avimukteswaraswamy Brahmarathotsava will be held on Buddha Purnima, and this time a new chariot has been built at an estimated cost of Rs. 2.5 crore with the cooperation of MLA Sharath Bachegowda and the Bendiganahalli family. The chariot built in Udupi consists of 9 columns, and everything including the wheel, alignment, and axle is made of teak wood. It will arrive in the city from Udupi at 4.35 pm on March 27 and will be welcomed at the Anjaneyaswamy Temple in Parvathipura. Then it will reach the Avimukteswaraswamy Temple with a procession through the main streets of town. Convener of the Brahmarathotsava Committee N Keshavamurthy has appealed that the Gowdas, Yajamans, Ganacharis and devotees of taluk and town participate and cooperate in this programme.

Drugs in chocolate packets worth ₹ 3.8 cr seized

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

The Upparapet police have arrested a man for illegally transporting drugs in chocolate packets. Rs 3.80 crore was recovered from the accused. 3 kg 900 grams of MDMA drugs worth 3 kg were seized. Kiran, a resident of Bidar, was arrested and used to procure drugs from Delhi and sell them in Silicon City. Acting on a tip-off, the police arrested a man who was waiting to deliver drugs to a man at Gandhinagar under Upparapet police station limits. The Upparapet police are further investigating the matter.

'Rapid digital adoption increases cyber risk'

The CySec report identified an increase in cyber threats against businesses, critical infra, govt agencies, and citizens

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

The state Government has released a comprehensive report on cybersecurity in the state, the new types of cyber threats being faced every day, and the steps to be taken to strengthen digital resilience.

The Cybersecurity Center of Excellence (CySecK) has prepared a comprehensive report for 2025–26.

The report, which warns that rapid digital adoption in various sectors has increased the potential for potential cyber risks, identified that cyber threats to businesses, critical infrastructure, government institutions and citizens across the state are increasing as reliance on cloud platforms, digital payments, interconnected systems and data-driven services increases.

CySEC, a flagship initiative of the Department of Electronics, IT, BT and Science and Technology, Government of Karnataka, is playing a key role in strengthening the state's cyber security system. It is working towards building a secure and future-ready digital system through a structured approach that includes skill development, industry collaboration, research and innovation, and government

cyber capacity building.

Dr N Manjula, Secretary, Department of Electronics, IT, BT and Science and Technology, said, as the state's digital ecosystem continues to evolve, cybersecurity is a critical pillar of our growth and governance framework.

Key areas prioritized in the survey include Cyber Security Environment and Risk Assessment, a detailed review of the rapidly expanding digital landscape in the state and the cyber threats emerging across various sectors. Skill Building and Talent Development, large-scale initiatives including school programs, teacher training, cybersecurity training camps, and massive open online learning (MOOC) programmes to bridge the gap between academia and industry.

Industry and Startup System, strengthening collaboration through accelerator programs like HACK, industry partnerships and platforms like Karnataka CISO Forum (CISO-KA). Research and Innovation, advances in areas such as hardware security, maintaining security despite threats, and adversarial threat analysis through separate laboratories and research programmes. Government Capacity Development and Cyber Awareness, initiatives focused on increasing cyber cleanliness, strengthening institutional capacities, and supporting law enforcement preparedness.

The annual review prepared by CySEC reflects our commitment to strengthening cybersecurity through collaboration, innovation and capacity building. It provides valuable insights that will guide stakeholders across sectors in addressing emerging threats and building the state's digital future.

₹250 cr action plan for welfare of ex-Devadasis, their children

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

Women and Child Development Minister Lakshmi Hebbalkar has said that a special package action plan worth Rs 250 crore has been prepared and submitted to the government for former Devadasis and their children.

Speaking under Rule 330 of the Legislative Council, Member Hemalatha Nayak drew the attention of the House that the life of Devadasis in Koppal, Raichur, Kalaburagi and Savadatti areas is beyond description. Government facilities are a mirage.

Responding to this, Minister Hebbalkar said that an action plan worth Rs. 25 crore has been formulated for the welfare of former Devadasis and their children, including Rs. 25 crore for providing sites to former Devadasis who were identified in the re-survey, Rs. 50 crore for those without housing, Rs. 5 crore for increasing group income-generating economic activities, and Rs. 150 crore for providing monthly stipend of Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 5,000 to former Devadasis. Action will be taken after discussing with the Social Welfare Minister.

Minister Lakshmi Hebbalkar said in the Legislative Council session that a proposal has been submitted to the government to increase the monthly salary of former Devadasis from ₹2,000 to ₹5,000.

Pension is being given to former Devadasi women above the age of 45. He said that a total of 13,663 former Devadasi women have been given incentives ranging from Rs 30,000 to Rs 50,000 from the State Women's Development Corporation since 2013-14.

10,725 people have received housing facilities from the Rajiv Gandhi Housing Corporation. The Women and Child Development Department conducted a survey of former Devadasi women (14 districts) in the state in 1993-94 and 2007-08 and a total of 46,660 former Devadasi women were identified. As per the budget announcement for the year 2024-25, a survey was conducted in 15 districts of the state and there are 23,395 former Devadasi women, he informed.

The re-survey revealed that there are a total of 90,092 children of former Devadasis in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd generation of former Devadasis women. An action plan has been prepared and submitted to the Social Welfare Department for providing them with education, skill training, training for competitive exams, income-generating training and loan facilities.

Samsung Innovation Campus programme launched at BMSCE

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

Samsung Innovation Campus is Samsung's global CSR and skilling initiative designed to equip young learners with future-ready digital skills. Through specialised training in emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data and Internet of Things (IoT), the programme aims to bridge the gap between academic learning and industry requirements. Through this initiative, students of BMS College of Engineering will benefit from structured training programs, industry-aligned curriculum, and mentorship from Samsung engineers.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by distinguished dignitaries, faculty members, and enthusiastic students. The newly established facility will serve as a technology hub where students can experiment, innovate, and develop solutions for real-world problems. The mission of the Samsung Innovation Campus is to bridge the gap between academia and industry by equipping students with practical knowledge and technical expertise required for the global digital economy. Through the specialized training programs, workshops, and collaborative projects, students will gain exposure to cutting-edge technologies and industry practices.

The programme is expected to significantly enhance students' employability, encourage innovation, and promote entrepreneurial thinking among young engineers. The Department of Computer Science and Engineering expressed its gratitude to Samsung for supporting this initiative and reaffirmed its commitment to nurturing future-ready technologists and innovators.

The event was graced by distinguished dignitaries including DB Sreevatsa, Vice-President–Platform Intelligence, SRI-B, Srimanu Prasad, Senior Director and Head of Tech Strategy and Customer Experience Team, SRI-B, Dr R Lokesh, Boregowda, Senior Director, Advanced Research and Standards Team, SRI-B; and Dr Balaji Rajendran, Associate Director at Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Bengaluru.

The ceremony was also attended by Dr. Bheemsha Arya, Principal of BMS College of Engineering; Dr L Ravikumar, Vice Principal (Academics), Dr Kavitha Sooda, Head of the Department of Computer Science and Engineering, and Dr CK Raghavendra (SPOC-SIC) along with faculty members and students of all engineering branches.

Aligned with the Government of India's Skill India and Digital India missions, the initiative aims to build a strong pipeline of AI and emerging technology talent while further reinforcing Bengaluru's position as India's innovation and technology capital.

State seeks more time to hold GP polls

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

The state government has requested the High Court to grant it four weeks' time to change the number of members in the state's gram panchayats according to the current population.

A division bench of Chief Justice Vibhu Bakhru and Justice CM Poonacha heard the public interest litigations filed by the State Election Commission seeking a direction to the state government to take immediate action to issue final reservation notifications to facilitate the commission in holding general elections in time for 5,950 Gram Panchayats and 187 Urban Local Bodies in the state whose terms have expired.

The lawyer for the state

government said that there are 5,950 Gram Panchayats in the state, with more than 96 thousand members. The total number of members needs to be identified according to the new population. This will take four weeks. After that, it will take at least 3 months to finalize the reservation process and submit the list to the Election Commission.

Continuing the argument, the lawyers said that a letter was written to all the Deputy Commissioners of the state on January 28, 2026, asking them to make all necessary preparations for holding elections to the Gram Panchayats whose terms expired in January of the current year. The Karnataka State Constituency Redistricting Commission should decide how many members should be elected to each Gram Panchayat based on the previous census currently in force and recommend it to the government. Accordingly, the Constituency Redistricting Commission has written a letter to all the District Collectors on March 18, asking them to provide the necessary figures to the Commission within 15 days. The Commission needs 2 weeks to receive information from the DCs and one week to review that information and recommend to the government.

MLAs dispute over English-Kannada medium

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

During the discussion of the Teachers Transfer Regulation Amendment Bill in the Assembly, a scuffle broke out between ruling party MLAs over the issue of Kannada and English medium education in schools.

Shivalingegowda demanded English medium, saying our children should learn English and go to America. They should travel around the country. I am not saying that Kannada medium is not necessary. But English medium is necessary. At this point, Basavaraja Rayareddy intervened and said that children should study in Kannada. There are good opportunities in Kannada too.

K'taka introduces key bills on school land ownership

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

Education Minister Madhu Bangarappa on Monday introduced the important 'Karnataka Government Educational Institution Lands (Protection and Regularization) (Amendment) Bill-2026' in the Legislative Assembly, which would cancel all encumbrances on any land in the state if a government school has been operating on that land for at least 12 consecutive years and prevent the rights of others over that land.

Through this bill, the land of schools running on donor land will vest in the government as per natural justice. All debts, rights or inheritance rights on the school land that have been in existence continuously for twelve years will be cancelled.

In many parts of the state, government educational institutions are functioning as establishments on donated lands, often without formal documentation or registered transfer. However, due to technical flaws in the documents, heirs or legal heirs have recently been filing disputes, leading to instability in land ownership.

Currently, there is no dedicated legislation to protect such lands for public education or to validate informal donations or gifts made. The existing law

does not adequately address the use of fixed land by government educational institutions. This has put thousands of underprivileged educational institutions in distress. Many schools are functioning on land donated by donors.

Bill seeks to prevent transfer of govt teachers to non-teaching posts

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

After a lengthy debate, the Karnataka State Civil Services (Regulation of Transfer of Teachers) Bill was passed in the Legislative Assembly.

Education Minister Madhu Bangarappa discussed in the Assembly the Karnataka State Civil Services (Regulation of Transfer of Teachers) Bill, which amends the transfer of teachers of Karnataka Public Schools, Adarsh Vidyalaya and PM Shri Schools who have served in the same place for at least twelve years.

We had stopped transfers where there were 250 children. Now we are doing it. Many teachers go to Diet and sit.

They cannot stay there for more than three years. This bill has been brought to control them too. We will transfer them on priority for 5 years. Action will be taken to address the shortage of teachers. There are already allegations of teacher shortage in many places. Once the recruitment is done, the shortage of teachers will end. If there is a shortage of teachers, we will provide guest teachers, he said.

SESSION END PREPONED

'Decision to conclude budget session on March 26'

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

Speaker UT Khader announced in the Assembly that the budget session will conclude on March 26.

The Speaker informed the House about the points decided in the Legislative Assembly Business Advisory Committee meeting. The debate on the budget will end on Tuesday. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will reply to the debate on the budget on Wednesday. He said that the session will end on March 26.

It has been decided to shorten the session by one day. The session was intended to be held till March 27. However, the session is now being concluded on March 26. The session is being shortened due to the campaigning in the backdrop of by-elections being held in two constituencies.

A discussion was held in the Legislative Assembly Business Advisory Committee meeting regarding the shortening of the session. All party members in the meeting expressed their agreement to conclude the session a day early. Thus, it has been

decided to limit the session, which was intended to last only 13 days, to 12 days and conclude it.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah presented the budget for the record 17th time on March 6. This time, the Chief Minister, who has announced several projects in the budget for the year 2026-27, has presented a budget of Rs 4.48 lakh crore.

For the third consecutive year, the government has presented a budget with a revenue deficit and a higher revenue deficit than last year. This is a budget with a revenue deficit of Rs 22,957 crore. Last year, a revenue deficit of about Rs 19,000 crore was shown.

In the year 2026-27, a total of Rs 1,32,000 crore. It is planned to resort to loans. In the last budget, Rs 1,16,000 crore. The loan was estimated to be raised. This time, even more loans have been resorted to. Out of the loan for the year 2026-27, Rs 6,810 crore. will be borrowed from the Center. Rs 1,22,340 crore. will be borrowed from the open market. The rest is estimated to be borrowed from SIC, NSSF, and RIDF.

The capital expenditure for the year 2026-27 is estimated at Rs 74,682 crore. Last time, Rs 68,172 crore was earmarked for capital expenditure. This time, a higher amount has been earmarked for capital expenditure.

QUICK READ

Mandya to celebrate Sri Agnibanniraya Jayanti Program

Mandya

Sri Agnibanniraya Jayanti will be celebrated on March 28 at 11 AM at Sri Nalvadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar Kala Mandir. The event is organized by the District Administration and Kannada and Culture Department. Agriculture Minister N. Chaluvarayaswamy will inaugurate the program, while Mandya MLA P. Ravikumar will preside. Union Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy, MLAs, MLCs, and various state chairpersons will attend as honorary guests. Karnataka History Academy member Madhusudan K. R. will deliver a lecture highlighting historical contributions. The program aims to honor cultural heritage and promote public awareness of local traditions, bringing officials, leaders, and citizens together for the celebration.

Udupi to celebrate Agni Banniraya Jayanti program

Udupi

The Sri Agni Banniraya Jayanti will be celebrated on March 27 at 10 AM in the court hall of Manipal Rajatadri District Collectorate. The event is jointly organized by the District Administration, Zilla Panchayat, and Kannada and Culture Department. The program will be inaugurated by Minister Lakshmi R. Hebbalkar, while MLA Yashpal A. Suvarna will preside. Several dignitaries, including MPs Kota Srinivas Poojary, B.Y. Raghavendra, MLAs V. Sunil Kumar, Gururaj Shetty Gantihole, and Kiran Kumar Kodgi, along with other officials, will attend. Cultural thinker Dr. Srikanth Siddhapura will give a lecture, highlighting traditions and local heritage.

Fierce Davanagere by-election sees massive nomination rush

38 candidates contest, 35 independents, 21 Muslims. BJP rally prayed at temple, toured city, confident of victory

DAVANAGERE

Davanagere saw intense political activity as 38 candidates filed nominations for the Davangere South Assembly by-election on the final day of filing. Major parties Congress and BJP led large processions, while rebel and independent candidates also joined the race.

Congress candidate Samarth Shamanur and BJP candidate Srinivasa T. Dasakariappa arrived with senior leaders and supporters before submitting their papers. Grand roadshows filled the streets with party flags, music, and cheering crowds.

Shamanur filed his nomination in the presence of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D. K. Shivakumar. Meanwhile, Dasakariappa was accompanied by former Chief Minister B. S. Yediyurappa.

A total of 38 candidates are in the fray, including 35 independents. Among them, 21 Muslim candidates have also entered the contest.

The BJP rally began with prayers at a local temple and passed through key city roads before reaching the municipal office. Leaders expressed confidence that public support would help them secure victory.

The Congress procession followed a similar route, drawing large crowds. Speaking to media, Siddaramaiah said the party focuses on inclusive development and has delivered on its promises.

Congress rebel candidate Sadiq Pailwan also filed his nomination and said he would not withdraw from the contest. He expressed hope of strong support from minority communities.

Several other candidates, including those from smaller parties and independents, have added to the competitive nature of this by-election. Voters are expected to play a crucial role in deciding the outcome as campaigning gains momentum in the coming days with rallies and outreach programs planned by all major contenders.

All-night protest intensifies over Sharavati Power Project

SHIVAMOGGA

An all-night sit-in protest began in Shivamogga against the Sharavati Pumped Storage Project, drawing strong opposition from environmental groups and local leaders. The protest is being led by former Deputy Chief Minister K. S. Eshwarappa along with several organisations concerned about ecological damage.

Maruti Guruji said the movement protects the future, warning dams threaten Sharavati River, wildlife, and ecosystem. Protesters criticized rising costs, loans, and environmental, financial risks

Speaking at the event, spiritual leader Maruti Guruji said the movement is not for personal benefit but for protecting the future. He stressed that the project could harm nature, wildlife, and disturb the natural flow of the Sharavati River.

Protesters raised concerns that multiple dams already exist on the river, and the new project would further disrupt its natural course by diverting water in the opposite direction. They warned that such changes could damage the fragile ecosystem of the Western Ghats.

Leaders also criticised rising project costs, claiming it has increased significantly over the years. They questioned the need for large loans and expressed doubts about the project's financial and environmental viability.

Former MLA Mahima Patel said protecting the Western Ghats is a shared responsibility and called for stronger environmental awareness. Another leader, A. T. Ramaswamy, described the protest as symbolic but warned of serious environmental consequences if the project continues.

The protestors claimed that thousands of trees could be lost and large areas of land affected. They also highlighted recent unusual weather patterns as signs of growing environmental imbalance.

Participants demanded that both state and central governments cancel the project immediately. They vowed to continue their struggle and build a larger public movement to protect the region's environment and natural resources.

Udupi to celebrate Bhagawan Mahavir Jayanti ceremony

UDUPI

The Bhagawan Mahavir Jayanti will be observed on March 30 at 10 AM in the court hall of Manipal Rajatadri District Collectorate. The event is organized jointly by the District Administration, Zilla Panchayat, Kannada and Culture Department, and Jain Milan Udupi.

Minister Lakshmi R. Hebbalkar will inaugurate the program, with MLA Yashpal A. Suvarna presiding. Several dignitaries, including MPs Kota Srinivas Poojary and B.Y. Raghavendra, MLAs V. Sunil Kumar, Gururaj Shetty Gantihole, Kiran Kumar Kodgi, and other officials, will participate. Shweta Jain will deliver a lecture, highlighting Jain teachings and cultural values to the attendees.

Over 15 villagers injured; serious cases sent to Gadag GIMS, others treated locally. Police deployed, peace assured

Drinking water dispute sparks village clashes

GADAG

Tensions flared in Chikkavaddati village, Mundargi taluk, after a dispute over drinking water between two communities turned violent, leaving 15 people injured.

The trouble began on Monday night when a young man drank water on a farmer's land. The farmer, from the Valmiki community, objected because the man belonged to the SC community. The disagreement quickly spread through the village, escalating into a heated argument. Soon, both sides started throwing stones at each other, leading to multiple injuries.

More than 15 villagers from both communities were hurt in the clashes. Those with serious injuries were moved to Gadag GIMS Hospital, while others received treatment at Mundaragi Taluk Hospital.

District Superintendent of Police, Rohan Jagadish, visited the village to assess the situation. Additional police forces have been deployed to prevent further violence, and authorities have assured strict measures will be in place to maintain peace.

The incident highlights underlying tensions in the area and the need for careful community management. Villagers are urged to resolve conflicts peacefully to avoid further harm. This clash comes amid rising concerns about local disputes over essential resources such as water, which have occasionally sparked violent confrontations in rural areas. Authorities continue monitoring the village closely to ensure calm returns.

The community and law enforcement are working together to restore order and prevent any escalation in the coming days.

Protest erupts against US-Israel attack on Iran

THOKKOTTU

A strong protest was held at Thokkottu Junction as several pro-people organisations came together to condemn the recent attacks on Iran by the United States and Israel. Members of Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), and Janwadi Mahila Sanghatane (JMS) jointly organised the demonstration, drawing attention to rising global tensions.

Protesters raised slogans and expressed concern over the ongoing conflict, which began after coordinated strikes by the United States and Israel on Iran earlier this year. (Wikipedia) Many warned that the situation could escalate further and affect countries across the world.

Addressing the gathering, CITU district vice president Sukumar Thokkottu strongly criticised the actions of the US government. He accused former US President Donald Trump of pursuing control over global oil resources and said the attack on Iran was part of a larger strategy.

Speakers at the protest said the conflict could have serious economic effects on India. They pointed out that rising tensions in the Middle East may disrupt fuel supplies, leading to shortages of cooking gas, petrol, and diesel.

Progressive thinker Ramesh Ullal also addressed the crowd, urging people to stand united against war and violence.

Several leaders and activists from workers', farmers', and women's groups took part in the protest. The event concluded with a call for peace and global cooperation, as participants stressed that ordinary people are the ones who suffer most during such conflicts.

Leopard that terrified village found dead

SHIVAMOGGA

A leopard that attacked a farmer and caused fear among villagers in Shiralakoppa Tadasanahalli has died, forest officials confirmed on Tuesday. The animal's body was discovered near the farmer's garden, and villagers immediately alerted the authorities.

Forest department officers, along with a veterinarian, carried out a post-mortem examination.

Officials say the leopard had no visible injuries, and preliminary findings suggest it may have died of starvation, as its stomach was empty. Shiralkoppa Range Forest Officer Javed Basha Angadi explained that the leopard had been roaming the area for several days and behaved unusually, not fleeing even when cars or bikes approached. "It may have been sick or weak," he said.

Leopard attacks on humans are rare in the region, where the big cats usually avoid people. Residents hope the final report will provide more clarity about the animal's death, which has left the village both relieved and saddened.

Udupi launches 100-day campaign to eradicate tuberculosis

UDUPI

Udupi district has launched an ambitious 100-day campaign aimed at making the district tuberculosis-free through coordinated efforts by all concerned departments. Senior Civil Judge and Member Secretary of the District Legal Services Authority, Manu Patel, emphasized that tuberculosis remains the leading infectious disease causing deaths in India and called for joint action to permanently eliminate it.

The program, held at Sri Krishna Hall under the District Health and Family Welfare Officer's Office in Ajjarkadu, was jointly organized by the District Administration, Zilla Panchayat, Health and Family Welfare Department, District Tuberculosis Eradication Office, and District Legal Services Authority. It also included an award ceremony honoring TB-free Gram Panchayats.

Patel highlighted the role of Panchayat officers, ASHA workers, Anganwadi staff, and health department personnel in identifying cases, ensuring treatment, and raising awareness about tuberculosis in both rural and urban areas. He stressed the importance of removing misconceptions and providing continuous support to patients until full recovery.

District Health and Family Welfare Officer Dr. Basavaraj Hubballi explained that staff and ASHA workers are conducting home visits to monitor public health and support the campaign. District Tuberculosis Eradication Officer Dr. Chidananda Sanju noted that Udupi currently operates 3 CBNAAT and 8 TRUNAT machines, detecting approximately 1,500 TB cases annually. New Android X-ray machines will soon be used for early detection of symptomatic patients.

During the program, 64 Gram Panchayats were recognized as TB-free. Awards included gold, silver, and bronze medals for their achievements in implementing preventive measures. The event was attended by senior health officials, Taluk Health Officers, Panchayat Development Officers, and frontline health workers.

The campaign will continue with TB screening and treatment for vulnerable communities, aiming to safeguard public health and eradicate tuberculosis in the district.

Supporters defend minister against false allegations

KOPPAL

Koppal District In-charge Minister Shivaraj Thangadgi came under criticism recently, but his supporters have condemned statements made against him by Arya Ediga Samaj guru Pranavananda Swamigal. Guarantee Committee District President Reddy Srinivas said the allegations are misleading and unfair.

Speaking at a press conference at the Patrika Bhawan of the Working Journalists' Association, Srinivas clarified that Minister Thangadgi has actively supported the development of the Ediga community. He highlighted that the minister facilitated the community's march from Bidar to Bengaluru, presenting their demands to the Chief Minister. Srinivas added that the Chief Minister and other ministers have assured fulfillment of these demands after the assembly session.

Srinivas criticized Swamigal for making false statements in Koppal and threatening to protest in front of the minister's house. "Minister Thangadgi has invested crores in infrastructure projects, including roads in Basavanna Camp and Hebbal Camp, benefiting the Ediga community directly," he said.

He appealed that community leaders should speak respectfully and avoid political-style accusations. Srinivas emphasized that supporters of the minister will not join the planned protest and urged constructive dialogue for community development.

The press conference was attended by Karatagi Ediga Samaj leader and municipal member Nagaraj Edigera, along with Udayakumar and Mangalesh Edigera. The gathering reiterated their support for Minister Thangadgi and called for unity in advancing the Ediga community's interests.

SMALL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

Trade Fair boosts small entrepreneurs in Shivamogga

SHIVAMOGGA

A three-day trade fair aimed at supporting small entrepreneurs and artisans has begun at Ambedkar Bhavan in Shivamogga. The event showcases products made by beneficiaries of the Vishwakarma Yojana, a central government scheme focused on skill development and financial assistance.

Member of Parliament B. Y. Raghavendra said the fair includes over 50 stalls displaying a wide range of locally made goods. He encouraged the public to visit, purchase products, and support small business owners.

According to him, the initiative has already benefited around 6,500 youth and economically weaker individuals in the district. Training and financial support under the scheme have helped them become self-reliant and lead dignified lives.

Raghavendra also spoke about current political developments, expressing confidence in his party's performance in upcoming by-elections across several states. He claimed that growing public support and recent political trends indicate a positive outcome.

Addressing concerns about fuel supply amid global tensions, he assured that adequate arrangements have been made to ensure smooth availability of LPG for both domestic and commercial use. He added that supply has been increased to prevent shortages and inconvenience to the public.

On local issues, he said discussions are ongoing regarding the Sharavati pumped storage project, with environmental considerations being taken into account before any final decision. He also mentioned efforts to continue flight services from Shivamogga, including talks with IndiGo officials to prevent suspension of operations.

Local BJP leaders and officials were present at the event, supporting the initiative to strengthen grassroots entrepreneurship and promote locally made products.

QUICK READ

Mandya to hold public hearing on tree removal

Mandya

A public opinion hearing will be held on March 30 at 11 AM at Bharathinagar Gram Panchayat regarding the removal of 90 trees in Manigere village, Maddur taluk. These trees are obstructing development work in a Scheduled Castes cemetery. The Deputy Conservator of Forests, Mandya Division, will collect feedback from the public, environmentalists, and organizations. The Maddur Zonal Forest Officers stated that anyone with objections or complaints about the tree removal can appear in person and submit them during the session. This step ensures transparency and allows the community to voice concerns before the Forest Department proceeds with the auction and disposal.

Tiger cub captured near Bandipur after panic

Chamarajanagar

A one-and-a-half-year-old male tiger cub was captured near Gundlupete in Bandipur Tiger Reserve after causing alarm among villagers in Channamallipura, officials said. The cub was spotted near the Gundlupete-Sultan Batteri road, prompting local authorities to impose Section 144 to prevent public movement in the area. The operation involved the Forest Department, police, and a trained dog named Dharma. Under veterinarian Dr. Wasim Mirza's supervision, sharpshooter Forester Kumar sedated the tiger to safely capture it. During the process, two forest personnel were injured by the exhausted animal. They were admitted to Gundlupet Hospital and are receiving treatment. Forest Conservator Prabhakaran, Tehsildar M.S. Thanmay, DSP Sneharaj, ACF K. Suresh, and RFO Puneeth Kumar visited the site to assess the situation. The Forest Department continues to monitor the cub's health and will decide on its future. Villagers expressed relief as the young tiger is now under professional care.

Youth murdered over ₹7,000 dispute

Hassan

A shocking crime over a mere Rs 7,000 has rocked Hassan district. Police have arrested five people in connection with the kidnapping, assault, and murder of K.M. Varun. The accused — Satish, Umar, Vijaya Nayak, Dasarakoppalu Chetan, and Manu — held Varun for two days and brutally attacked him, officials said. According to District Superintendent of Police Shubhanvitha, the dispute began when Varun was unable to return money given by Shashank, who is still being sought along with other accomplices. Varun had left home on March 10, claiming he was going to repair his bike, but never returned. His friend Lohit, who was also captured, managed to escape and alert villagers. Tragically, Varun died from continuous assault. The accused tried to hide their crime by moving the body to another village and burning it on March 13. Police are continuing the investigation to capture all involved.

Srinivaspura leaders demand immediate water release

Lakes dry despite K.C. Valley project; officials urged to release water promptly for farmers, livestock, preventing protests

SRINIVASPURA

Local leaders have raised concerns over the delay in supplying water to lakes under the K.C. Valley project in Srinivaspura, urging authorities to ensure immediate water release.

Speaking at the KSRTC new bus stand during the launch of a car rally from Srinivaspura to Muduvadi and Lakshmisagara lakes under the "Water is Our Right" campaign, PLD Bank President Dimbal Ashok said several groundwater development initiatives had been planned in the taluk, thanks to the efforts of former MLA K.R. Ramesh Kumar.

Despite the completion of pipelines for the K.C. Valley project, many lakes have dried up, Ashok noted, emphasizing that water should be released without delay to support farmers and livestock.

KPCC member Sanjay Reddy expressed concern over falling groundwater levels, highlighting that the project was intended to meet the needs of both agriculture and livestock. He criticized the slow pace of work and called for immediate action to ensure water reaches all lakes in the taluk.

Officials from the Minor Irrigation and Groundwater Development Department, including engineer Venkataramana, along with KOMUL Director N. Hanumesh, PLD Bank Director Reddappa, former municipal president B.M. Prakash, and several other leaders attended the event.

The campaign seeks to create awareness about water conservation and ensure that all completed projects under the K.C. Valley initiative fulfill their intended purpose.

Villagers oppose move to merge into municipality

DEVANAHALLI

Somashekar urged villages to remain under Gram Panchayat, citing peaceful coexistence, livelihoods, and proper procedures. Villagers opposed merging into municipal limits, appealing to authorities

Strong opposition has emerged in Devanahalli taluk over the proposed transfer of villages under Bettakote Gram Panchayat to the municipality. Local leaders and residents have demanded that the plan be dropped immediately. Rayasandra Somashekar, taluk president of an Ambedkar organisation, submitted a petition to Deputy Commissioner Dr. K. Anuradha and other officials at the district administration office. He urged authorities not to merge Rayasandra, Bettakote, and Baladimmanahalli villages into the Devanahalli Municipality.

Speaking to reporters, Somashekar said these villages should continue under the Gram Panchayat system, as they have long functioned under rural governance. He argued that shifting them to municipal limits would affect local administration and the livelihoods of residents.

He also pointed out that people from different communities, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, minorities, and backward classes, live together peacefully in these villages. According to him, decisions of such importance should follow proper procedures under the Panchayat Raj Act.

Villagers said a meeting was held earlier where they collectively opposed the move. They have appealed to district authorities and the government to respect their demand and maintain the current structure.

The petition warned that if the proposal is not withdrawn, residents will launch legal protests. Around 3,000 people from the three villages are expected to take part in demonstrations along with support from pro-Dalit, farmer, Kannada, and workers' organisations.

Several villagers and local leaders were present during the submission of the petition, showing unity against the proposed administrative change.

Kumaraswamy urged scientific lake management, clear information and warning boards, regular channel cleaning, and inter-departmental coordination

Officials push strong measures to protect district lakes effectively

CHITRADURGA

The district administration has proposed strict steps to protect lakes from encroachment and damage, with a focus on scientific management and public awareness.

Additional Deputy Commissioner B. T. Kumaraswamy suggested installing geo-fencing and detailed information boards around lakes to clearly mark their boundaries and prevent illegal occupation. He was speaking at a district-level meeting of the Federation of Lake Users' Associations held at the collector's office.

He said that the shrinking area of lakes due to encroachment is a serious concern. To address this, authorities plan to conduct proper surveys, mark boundaries, and create trenches along lake borders. Tree planting along these borders will also help protect the lakes in the long run.

Kumaraswamy stressed that information boards must display key details such as survey numbers, lake area, ownership, and elevation. Warning boards highlighting legal penalties for damaging lakes will also be installed to spread awareness among the public.

He further explained that lakes should be managed scientifically without altering their natural structure. Water channels feeding the lakes often get blocked, leading to water overflow into nearby fields during rains. These channels must be cleaned regularly to ensure smooth water flow.

Highlighting the importance of coordination, he said departments like Minor Irrigation, Revenue, and Zilla Panchayat must work together, as lakes are public assets.

He also cautioned against unscientific desilting and banned commercial extraction of sand or gravel. Officials were instructed to monitor such activities strictly.

The administration emphasized that protecting water bodies is vital to avoid future water shortages and ensure sustainable development.

Mandya launches 100-day campaign to fight tuberculosis

MANDYA

Mandya district has begun a 100-day "TB Mukta Bharat Abhiyan" to raise awareness and strengthen efforts to eliminate tuberculosis. Deputy Commissioner Dr. Kumar said prevention is crucial, and patients can be cured with timely medical treatment and proper care.

The program, held at the District Commissioner's office, was organized by the District Administration, Zilla Panchayat, and Health and Family Welfare Department on the occasion of World Tuberculosis Day. Dr. Kumar stressed that TB patients should be treated with care, trust, and compassion, and that the public must remain vigilant since TB is a curable disease.

Zilla Panchayat CEO K. R. Nandini highlighted that tuberculosis is an infectious disease, spreading from person to person, and outlined the campaign's three main goals: detect all TB cases, reduce mortality among patients, and prevent new infections.

The campaign focuses on making every Gram Panchayat in the district TB-free. Forty Gram Panchayats have already been recognized as Tuberculosis-Free, with Dalavai Kodihalli receiving a gold medal for maintaining this status for the past three years.

Officials emphasized that public participation is key to eliminating TB. Awareness programs will be conducted in all areas, and patients will receive timely treatment and monitoring.

The event was attended by District Health and Family Welfare Officers Dr. K. Mohan, District Tuberculosis Eradication Officer Dr. Ashalatha, Taluk Health Officers, District Education Officer Dr. Venugopal, program coordinators, and health department staff. The authorities urged the public to participate actively in the campaign to ensure a TB-free Mandya.

Villagers protest alleged land grab in Devanahalli

DEVANAHALLI

Tension is rising in Devanahalli as villagers of Akenahalli-Mallenahalli Jodi village have alleged large-scale land encroachment involving the family of MLC M. R. Seetharam.

At a press conference, Nikhil M, state president of the KRS youth wing, claimed that around 6 acres and 18 guntas of government land has been illegally occupied. He said the land falls under Anneshwara Gram Panchayat limits and demanded immediate government action to reclaim it. Villagers have already staged protests in front of the district administration office in Beerasandra and submitted a petition to authorities. They accused officials of inaction despite repeated complaints and warned of stronger protests if no steps are taken by March 31.

Senior advocate Siddat alleged misuse of power, claiming the land is not being used for farming but is instead being handed over to wealthy individuals. He criticised the lack of basic facilities for poor residents while influential groups benefit from public land.

According to villagers, families who have lived in the area for generations are being forced out, while encroachment continues unchecked. They also pointed out that despite directions from the High Court to clear such encroachments, no concrete action has been taken so far.

Protesters demanded a detailed investigation and immediate site inspection by officials. They insisted that the entire land should be returned to the villagers and not allotted to private parties.

Activists warned that if the government fails to act, they will intensify their agitation and lay siege to the District Collector's office in the coming days.

Mass wedding event planned at Dasoha Math

RAMANAGARA

A free mass wedding and first-year commemoration program of Basavalingaraja Swamiji will be held on June 27 and 28 at Dasoha Math in Revanasiddheshwar Betta, Avverahalli. The announcement was made by Rajashekar Shivacharya Swamiji during a preparatory meeting held at the Math premises.

He said the Math, known for its service for over 150 years, is organizing the event as part of social welfare activities. The late Basavalingaraja Swamiji had contributed greatly to the development of the Math and was respected across the country. Devotees have decided to mark his first anniversary through meaningful community service.

On June 27, programs such as mass Lingadiksha, a blood donation camp, and a health camp will be conducted. The following day will feature a free mass wedding and religious ceremonies. Several prominent religious leaders and dignitaries are expected to attend the event.

District president of All India Veerashaiva Mahasabha, H. S. Yoganand, said the initiative aims to support underprivileged families. The Math will provide essential items for couples, including a gold mangalsutra, silver anklets, clothes, and other necessities.

He urged interested couples to register before June 10 by submitting required documents at the Math.

Several community leaders and local representatives attended the meeting and expressed support for the initiative. The organisers said the event will not only honour the late Swamiji but also promote social harmony and help those in need through collective efforts.

RURAL SPIRIT SHINES

Holalu village celebrates women through sports

MANDYA

Holalu village in Mandya taluk came alive with sports and fun activities to mark International Women's Day, inspiring women and children alike.

The event was organized by the Kaveri Girls' Association and Indira Yuvathi Girls' Association under the leadership of Ningarajamma, president of the Cauvery Girls' Association. The chief guest, Latha Shankar, a farmer leader from the Karnataka State Farmers' Association, inaugurated the competitions by throwing a ball, emphasizing that rural women, who work tirelessly in fields and with livestock, can enjoy such events to celebrate happiness and enthusiasm.

Bhagyamma, headmistress of a government school, praised Ningarajamma for organizing similar programs in Holalu, which honor women who have contributed to society. Ramya Chethan, president of Holalu Gram Panchayat, said these games encourage women and children to participate and help recognize their achievements.

The day featured games like frog jumping, musical chairs, ring toss, running rice races, passing the ball with hot ghee, lakeside games, and Bombay games for children and women.

Anganwadi and Asha workers, former presidents Padma and Nirupama, Dairy President Savitriamma, and local officials also attended to support the event.

The program highlighted the spirit of community participation and celebrated women's contributions, showing how traditional villages are blending fun and recognition to encourage participation, learning, and social engagement among women and children.

QUICK READ

Farmer murdered over land dispute in Chitradurga

Chitradurga
Veerabhadrappa, 55, was brutally killed in Kadleguddu village, Chitradurga, in front of his children over a land dispute. Around 10 AM, while heading to his farm, he was chased by Nandan on a tractor. After falling from his bullock cart, Nandan allegedly attacked him with a machete. The incident was recorded on the mobile phone of Veerabhadrappa's sons. The dispute between Veerabhadrappa's and Kantharaj's families had been ongoing for a year, with threats reported to police earlier.

Gadag taluk to review guarantee scheme progress

Gadag
A progress review meeting for Gadag Taluk Level Guarantee Schemes will be held on March 30 at 11 AM in the V.C. Hall of Gadag Zilla Panchayat. The meeting will be chaired by Ashok Mandali, Chairman of the Gadag Taluk Guarantee Schemes Implementation Authority. The T.P. Executive Officer and Member Secretary of the Taluk Guarantee Schemes Committee said the review aims to assess ongoing projects, identify challenges, and plan further improvements. Officials and committee members will discuss the progress of various schemes to ensure effective implementation and timely benefits for citizens, strengthening local development initiatives in the taluk.

Rising oil imports threaten India's energy security: MP G. Kumar Naik

Naik said India's crude production fell, import reliance rose, exploration lags, and geopolitical tensions worsen energy security

KALABURAGI

Raichur MP G. Kumar Naik has raised concerns over India's growing dependence on crude oil imports, warning that declining domestic production could expose the country to global market uncertainties.

Citing data from the Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Mr. Naik said India's crude oil production fell from 36.9 million metric tonnes in 2015-16 to 28.7 million metric tonnes in 2024-25. At the same time, import reliance rose sharply from 80.6% to 88.2%, highlighting an increasing dependence on external sources to meet energy demands.

"This trend is particularly worrying amid geopolitical tensions and volatile global oil prices," he noted, pointing to uncertainties in West Asia and changing international trade patterns.

Despite government efforts to diversify import sources across 41 countries and award 172 oil and gas blocks under the Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP), Mr. Naik said domestic exploration has yet to boost production. He also highlighted a decline in operational oil rigs, showing limited growth in upstream capacity.

He stressed that the rise in spot purchases of crude oil leaves the country exposed to global price swings and supply disruptions.

While appreciating the growth of renewable energy capacity, Mr. Naik cautioned that its contribution to actual power generation remains modest. Achieving India's goal of sourcing most electricity from non-fossil fuels by 2047 will require major investments in grid modernisation, storage systems, and efficient energy infrastructure.

Mr. Naik urged a balanced energy strategy that strengthens domestic oil production while accelerating the shift toward sustainable energy, ensuring India's energy security amid global uncertainties.

MLA pushes for more Ayurveda, Homeopathy doctors

BENGALURU

Dr. Shailendra Beldale has called for urgent creation and filling of posts for Ayurveda and Homeopathy doctors, along with the establishment of a new government Homeopathy college in the Kalyana Karnataka region.

Speaking in the Vidhan Sabha, he emphasized the need to strengthen the AYUSH department by setting up Ayurveda and Homeopathy treatment centers at every hobli, taluk, and district. According to him, rural and remote areas often face a shortage of medical services, and alternative medical systems can provide easier access for local residents.

Dr. Beldale suggested that posts for Ayurvedic doctors and specialists should be created and filled immediately. He noted that in places where MBBS doctors are unavailable, B.H.M.S. and B.A.M.S. graduates can ensure continuous health services.

He also stressed the importance of starting a new Government Homeopathy and Ayurveda Medical College in Kalyana Karnataka. This, he said, would offer better educational opportunities to local students while further strengthening the region's healthcare system.

MLA urged strengthening AYUSH by establishing Ayurveda and Homeopathy centers, filling specialist posts, and opening a new medical college to improve healthcare access and education in Kalyana Karnataka

The MLA urged the Health and Family Welfare Minister to pay immediate attention to these proposals and take necessary steps to implement them.

Nagesh Sidda, media coordinator for Dr. Beldale, said the MLA is committed to improving healthcare access in underserved areas through better staffing and education in alternative medicine.

Dr. Anand urged officials to assess crop damage, submit reports, and advised farmers to use ISD crop insurance

Storm hits Vijayapura, farmers seek quick survey

VIJAYAPURA

Vijayapura District Collector Dr. Anand K. has directed officials to conduct a joint survey of damage caused to agriculture and horticulture crops due to the recent storm and hailstorm. The survey report is expected to be submitted within three days.

Dr. Anand gave the instructions during a meeting with officials from the Agriculture, Horticulture, Revenue Departments, and the Crop Insurance Company. He emphasized forming a team of departmental officials to visit the affected areas, assess the damage in detail, and submit a joint report promptly.

He also advised farmers whose crops were damaged by rain, wind, and hail to take advantage of crop insurance. Farmers who have insured their crops under the Individual Specific Disasters (ISD) scheme can register complaints with Oriental General Insurance Company Limited at 1800 425 6678 within the next 72 hours.

Under the 2025-26 KHAIS scheme, farmers with hailstorm damage to grapes, pomegranates, and citrus crops should provide details of their insured crops to the ISD Ombud at 1800 425 0505 within the same timeframe.

The District Collector stressed that insurance company officials and departmental teams must coordinate effectively to complete the joint survey and ensure farmers receive support quickly.

This initiative comes as a relief to farmers who have suffered significant crop losses due to extreme weather in the district. Quick reporting and assessment are expected to help expedite compensation and recovery measures.

Officials and farmers are urged to cooperate fully to ensure accurate reporting and timely assistance, helping the district's agriculture sector recover from the sudden damage caused by the storm and hail.

Stone quarries may shut over OTS dispute warning

BENGALURU

The Karnataka State Quarry and Stone Crusher Owners' Association has warned that stone quarries, gravel crushers, and M-Sand supply in the state could be halted if the government does not revise the unscientific One Time Settlement (OTS) scheme, which governs stone mining, and address other pressing concerns.

The warning came during a meeting of the Association's district office bearers at Maurya Hotel in Bengaluru. Association president D. Siddharaju said the government's OTS scheme, introduced by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to mobilize funds for guarantee schemes, imposes excessive charges on long-standing quarry operators while favoring multinational companies. "We are ready to pay Rs. 2 lakh per acre, but higher charges are impossible for us," he said.

The Association also objected to duplicate royalty collection from mining contractors and described the administrative handling of the Department of Mines and Geology as chaotic, with frequent changes in secretaries and principal secretaries disrupting operations. Members stressed that current amendments to the KMMCR-1994 rules are inadequate and that remote sensing surveys to determine stone mining wealth are illegal.

Vice president Sanjeev V. Hattiholi added that the OTS scheme was implemented without consulting quarry operators and demanded the government issue a white paper detailing royalties collected from the quarry sector so far. The Association threatened to block the entry of stone resources from outside states, suspend supply to construction projects, and launch legal action unless its demands are met. The protest, if carried out, could affect both residential and public sector construction projects across Karnataka.

All 26 district presidents, office bearers, and key members including Vageesh, Abdul Majid, Manoje Shettar, Panchami Srinivas, General Secretary C.S. Bhaskar, and Treasurer Umashankaraiah participated in the meeting.

Mandya plans grand celebration for social leaders

MANDYA

The district administration is gearing up to celebrate the birth anniversaries of Dr. Babu Jagjivan Ram on April 5 and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on April 14 in a meaningful and organized way, said District Collector Dr. Kumar.

Speaking at a preliminary meeting, Dr. Kumar emphasized that the celebrations should be marked with cooperation, harmony, and active participation from all residents. He suggested that eminent personalities should garland the statues of the leaders at 10:00 am, followed by a procession at 10:30 am, and a formal meeting program at 11:00 am.

The Collector stressed the importance of recognizing Dr. Babu Jagjivan Ram, a pioneer of the Green Revolution, and Dr. Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution. He instructed that invitation letters be sent to all officers, organizations, and the public, and requested government employees to attend and take part in the celebrations at the taluk level.

Banners highlighting the lives and contributions of these leaders will be displayed, and five individuals who have excelled in education, social service, or the military will be felicitated.

Officials present at the meeting included Vijayalakshmi Raghunandan, Vice President of the Small Industries Development Corporation, ZP CEO K. R. Nandini, Superintendent of Police Thimmaiah, and Assistant Director of Social Welfare Department Srinivas. The district administration aims to make the celebrations a model for meaningful remembrance, inspiring citizens to honor the legacies of these social reformers.

Chitradurga raises awareness to fight tuberculosis

CHITRADURGA

Tuberculosis (TB) is completely curable if treated properly, said Dr. H.C. Guruprasad during a World Tuberculosis Day awareness program in Mirasabihalli, Challakere taluk.

Speaking at the event, he stressed that TB is not fatal when diagnosed early and treated according to prescribed guidelines. Government hospitals provide diagnosis and treatment free of cost, with a six-month treatment plan following World Health Organization standards. Patients undergoing treatment also receive Rs. 1,000 monthly through direct cash transfer to support nutritious food during recovery.

Dr. Guruprasad urged the public to watch for symptoms such as a persistent cough lasting more than two weeks, evening fevers, weight loss, weakness, and loss of appetite. Anyone showing these signs should immediately visit the nearest government hospital for testing. For further assistance, citizens can call the toll-free helpline 104 or the Nikshay helpline at 1800 11 6666.

The program emphasized community involvement in eradicating tuberculosis, with Health Inspector C.N. Naveen Kumar, Primary Health Protection Officer Arun Kumari, Community Health Officer Sneha, Nursing Officer Chand B, Bank Manager Dilip Kumar, ASHA workers Sarojamma and Radhamma, health worker Poorna Sagar, village leaders, and residents participating actively. Officials highlighted that public awareness, early detection, and proper treatment are key to defeating TB and ensuring healthier communities in rural areas.

Vocational Fair opens doors for youth careers

CHIKKABALLAPURA

Chikkaballapura Zilla Panchayat Chief Executive Officer Dr. Y. Naveen Bhat inaugurated a Vocational Education Exhibition and Career Fair on Tuesday at the Zilla Kannada Bhavan, emphasizing the importance of skill development in today's fast-paced world of science and technology.

Addressing students, Dr. Bhat said that job opportunities today are no longer limited to one state or country but are available at a global level. "Youth must equip themselves with the right skills to compete in fields like artificial intelligence, robotics, and business management.

Limiting oneself to a few local jobs is no longer enough," he said.

He encouraged students to draw inspiration from great achievers such as Bharat Ratna Dr. M. Visvesvaraya, Dr. C.N.R. Rao, Dr. H. Narasimhaiah, and Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy, who brought innovation and development to the country.

Yaluvalli N. Ramesh, Chairman of the District Guarantee Scheme Implementation Authority, highlighted the role of vocational education and career fairs in guiding students toward suitable careers. He also spoke about government initiatives like the Yuvanidhi Scheme, which provides financial support to job-seeking graduates and diploma holders. Students can register online, and the district employment office is available for assistance.

NAME CHANGE

I, **VEDANTH BILEKAHALLII NAGARAJ**, S/o. Nagaraj Bilekahalli Sampath, Resident of No. 16, 27th B Cross, Geetha Colony, Jayanagar 4th Block, Bengaluru -560011, Karnataka, have changed my name to **VEDANTH BILEKAHALLI NAGARAJ**, vide affidavit dated: 24.03.2026 before notary MEER HASSAN, Bengaluru.

NAME CHANGE

We, **UMAIR AHMED FAROOQ & MEHREEN ALI**, Resident of No. 46, Yellappa Chetty Layout, Ulsoor Road, Bengaluru -560042, Karnataka, have changed our minor son's name from **MOHAMMED YAHYA to MOHAMMED YAHYA AHMED**, vide affidavit dated: 24.03.2026 before notary MEER HASSAN, Bengaluru.

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Shivamogga MP pushes BSNL 4G expansion

SHIVAMOGGA

Shivamogga MP B.Y. Raghavendra has directed officials to complete the BSNL 4G saturation project in the district's network-deficient areas by the end of this year. He made the announcement while chairing the BSNL Telecommunication Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting at the district BSNL office on Tuesday.

The project, covering 287 villages, includes installing towers at 134 proposed sites. Of these, 17 fall under Gram Panchayats, six on private land, 48 on revenue land, 46 in forest areas, and 17 in wildlife zones. So far, 111 towers have been installed, eight are under progress, three have been stopped, and 12 await wildlife clearance.

MP Raghavendra instructed officials to resolve technical and forest land issues in coordination with Shivamogga and Karkala Chief Conservators of Forests. He emphasized expediting works under categories 5 to 7 and ensuring that no location, including Mallenahalli, Kanahalli, and Barige, is left out. Pending surveys must be completed, and stalled tower installations revisited without compromise.

He also urged officials to enhance rural and hilly area network coverage, expand 4G and 5G services, and provide BSNL fiber internet connections to every household. Efforts to address technical challenges, strengthen Bharat Net connectivity, and implement the Samriddhi Gram Yojana were highlighted as crucial steps toward achieving the Digital India vision.

BSNL General Manager Vinay Kumar Sinha, DGM Samita Sarkar, AGMs Ruban Vijay Singh and Girish Moolabharti, along with committee members and senior BSNL officials, attended the meeting. Officials also briefed the MP on BSNL WiFi call services and the Vidya Mitra initiative, underlining the government's commitment to bridging the digital divide in the district.

QUICK READ

Fuel panic triggers long queues across Hyderabad

HYDERABAD

Several petrol pumps across Hyderabad remained shut on Tuesday with "no stock" boards, while long queues were seen at open stations. Areas like Uppal, Mallapur and Chandrayangutta faced major inconvenience. Authorities said the rush was due to panic buying caused by rumours and confirmed there is no shortage of petrol, diesel or LPG in Telangana. At CNG outlets, motorists waited up to five hours. Traffic jams were reported in Nampally, and commuters were advised to take alternate routes.

Kashmiri separatist Asiya Andrabi gets life term

NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Tuesday sentenced Kashmiri separatist Asiya Andrabi to life imprisonment in a case under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Additional Sessions Judge Chander Jit Singh announced the punishment after hearing arguments on sentencing. Two of her associates, Sofi Fehmeeda and Nahida Nasreen, were also sentenced to 30 years in jail. The trio had been convicted earlier under UAPA sections related to membership and support of a terrorist organisation.

Delhi budget lays focus on manufacturing, AI, MSME

'People-focused Green Budget': Delhi Education Minister praises Delhi Budget 2026–27 as citizen-friendly and eco-conscious

NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Tuesday presented the Delhi Budget 2026-27, announcing several steps to boost manufacturing, technology and small businesses in the national capital.

She said the government plans to introduce a semiconductor policy to build strong infrastructure and attract companies to set up units in Delhi. A fund of Rs 1 crore has been set aside for this initiative.

Highlighting support from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Gupta said the aim is to create a complete ecosystem for semiconductor manufacturing, research and development. The budget also proposes a new drone policy with a Rs 1 crore fund to encourage startups and attract investment in emerging technologies.

To strengthen innovation, the government has allocated Rs 8.20 crore to establish two artificial intelligence centres of excellence. These centres will focus on research, innovation, and startup support. They will also develop AI-based solutions for governance and sectors such as healthcare, education, urban transport and public services.

The chief minister announced Rs 48 crore for building Common Facility Centres to improve productivity and competitiveness of small and medium enterprises. She stressed the need to upgrade infrastructure in industrial areas and improve logistics and warehousing systems.

An amount of Rs 10 crore has been allocated for a new warehousing policy to turn Delhi into a modern logistics hub. Gupta said Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises are the backbone of the city's economy and require strong support through skill development and digital integration.

Under the RAMP scheme, introduced with central support, 32,000 MSMEs will receive training, and 15,000 businesses will be connected to digital platforms to access wider markets.

Delhi Education Minister Ashish Sood on Tuesday praised the 2026–27 Budget presented by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, calling it a people-focused green budget. He highlighted the Rs 19,148 crore education allocation, the highest share, as a sign of priority. Sood said the government is working towards development under Narendra Modi's vision, adding the budget guides both economic and social sectors.

Delhi HC rejects Lalu Yadav's plea

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday dismissed a plea filed by Lalu Prasad Yadav seeking to quash a CBI FIR in the alleged land-for-jobs case. Justice Ravinder Dudeja ruled that the petition had no merit and rejected it.

Yadav had also requested the court to cancel three chargesheets filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation in 2022, 2023 and 2024, along with related court orders. However, the court declined all requests, allowing the case to proceed further. A detailed order is yet to be released.

The case is linked to appointments made in Group D posts of the Indian Railways' West Central Zone in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh. According to officials, these jobs were allegedly given during Yadav's tenure as railway minister between 2004 and 2009 in exchange for land parcels.

The land was reportedly transferred in the names of Yadav's family members or close associates by the candidates who were appointed.

The CBI registered the case on May 18, 2022, naming Yadav, his wife, two daughters, and several unknown public servants and private individuals.Yadav had argued that the investigation and chargesheets were not valid because prior approval under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act was not taken. He claimed this made the entire process legally flawed.

Despite these arguments, the High Court refused to interfere, stating that there were no grounds to quash the FIR or related proceedings.

Hyderabad doc faces notice over ORS label row

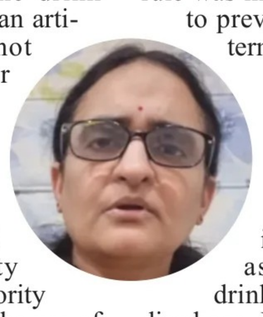
HYDERABAD

A Hyderabad-based pediatrician has received a legal notice after raising concerns over misleading marketing of electrolyte drinks resembling ORS solutions.

Dr Sivaranjani Santosh, known for her campaign against misuse of Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) labels, was served a notice by Johnson & Johnson and its consumer arm Kenvue. The notice accuses her of spreading

incorrect information about a rebranded drink, ERZL.

The dispute began after the doctor flagged similarities between earlier product ORSL and the new ERZL drink. She warned that consumers might confuse the product with ORS, which is medically used for dehydration. She also highlighted that the drink contains sucralose, an artificial sweetener not recommended for children below two years.



Dr Santosh has been active in this field for years. Her efforts contributed to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India restricting the use of "ORS" labeling unless products follow World Health Organization guidelines. This rule was introduced last year to prevent misuse of the term.

The company, however, rejected her claims, stating that ERZL complies with all safety norms and is clearly marketed as an electrolyte drink, not for treating diarrhoea. It said the product is meant for fatigue and hydration, and not for infants.

DMK allocates 8 seats to VCK for polls

CHENNAI

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam on Tuesday signed a seat-sharing agreement with ally Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi, allotting eight seats for the upcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly elections on April 23.

The pact was finalised during the second round of talks after VCK reduced its demand from ten seats to eight. The agreement was signed at Anna Arivalayam in Chennai by Chief Minister M K Stalin and VCK chief Thol Thirumavalavan in the presence of senior leaders from both parties.

As per the deal, VCK will contest from six reserved constituencies and two general seats as part of the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance. Thirumavalavan later said that his party had secured the two general constituencies it had requested during the discussions.

He also noted that the alliance currently includes 18 parties and has recently expanded, making seat-sharing negotiations more complex. He added that talks with other alliance partners are still ongoing and are expected to be completed within the next two to three days.

Responding to questions about accepting fewer seats than initially demanded, Thirumavalavan said the decision was taken in the interest of the alliance. He stated that since the DMK had made sacrifices in seat allocation, it was the responsibility of its allies to cooperate and ensure unity.

The agreement is seen as a key step in finalising the alliance strategy ahead of the elections.

Private sector, taxpayers key to nation building: Jindal

NEW DELHI

Naveen Jindal on Tuesday backed the Finance Bill 2026 in the Lok Sabha, calling it a forward-looking plan for India's future. He said taxpayers and the private sector are key partners in nation-building.

Jindal highlighted that the private sector provides over 80 percent of jobs and contributes more than 60 percent to India's GDP, while also driving innovation. He stressed the need to treat taxpayers with respect, noting that the GST base has crossed 1.5 crore and collections exceeded Rs 22 lakh crore in 2024-25.

He said the bill supports inclusive growth by empowering farmers, youth and women, and aims to ensure long-term economic stability. He added that India's IT exports have crossed $200 billion, while the pharmaceutical sector serves over 200 countries.

Jindal also pointed out that India has shown strong recovery despite challenges like COVID-19 and global tensions. He called for promoting natural farming to reduce chemical use and improve food quality. Suggesting reforms, he proposed joint tax filing for families, faster dispute resolution and simpler tax notices. He urged political unity to achieve the goal of a strong and self-reliant nation.

SABARIMALA SCAM: SIT SEEKS CANCELLATION OF TANTRI'S BAIL

KOCHI

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) on Tuesday moved the Kerala High Court seeking cancellation of bail granted to tantri Kantarar Rajeevar in a second case linked to the alleged Sabarimala Temple gold theft.

The court decided to hear this plea along with an earlier appeal related to the Dwarapalaka plank case. In that case, bail had been granted after 41 days of custody. The SIT has challenged the decision, arguing that key evidence was not properly examined before granting bail.

According to investigators, Rajeevar played an important role in the alleged conspiracy and cannot be seen as a minor participant. The SIT claims there is strong digital and witness evidence connecting him with the main accused, Unnikrishnan Potti.

Officials also said Rajeevar's knowledge of temple procedures and handling of sacred objects suggests deeper involvement. His alleged role in managing and moving valuables is being linked to a wider conspiracy.

The SIT has now filed a fresh petition in the related Kattilappali case, seeking cancellation of bail there as well.

It said the lower court ignored key aspects of the investigation and the coordination among accused persons.

The agency urged the High Court to review all evidence and cancel the bail, citing the seriousness of the case. Two charge sheets have named 13 accused, of whom 10 are currently on bail.

The case has also become a political issue during the ongoing election campaign in Kerala.

A REASON FOR ALARM

Snakebite deaths continue rising across India

NEW DELHI

India continues to report the highest number of snakebite deaths globally, contributing to nearly half of such fatalities worldwide, according to the World Health Organization. Experts say snakebite envenomation remains a major public health concern, particularly in rural regions where people frequently work outdoors.

A study published in Nature Communications links India's agriculture-based lifestyle to increased human-snake encounters. It estimates that about 7,094 snakebite cases occur annually, though experts believe the actual numbers are much higher due to underreporting. States such as Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar record the highest number of incidents.

The survey, conducted across 25 districts in 11 states, revealed that 47.5 percent of victims belonged to below poverty line families. Most cases involved men aged between 30 and 39 years. Snakebites were found to be more frequent during the rainy season, accounting for over 60 percent of incidents. Nearly half of the deaths occurred outside hospitals, even though a large number of victims eventually sought medical care. The four main venomous snakes responsible for most bites are the Indian cobra, common krait, Russell's viper and saw-scaled viper.

Treatment costs average around Rs 6,500, placing a heavy financial burden on poor families. Limited access to antivenom and delays in treatment further increase the risk of death or long-term disability. Some patients also face side effects from antivenom injections. A study by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences found that standard antivenom may not fully neutralise certain snake venoms. The government's National Action Plan aims to reduce snakebite deaths by half by 2030.

GOVERNMENT OF KARNATAKA

THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT DIVISION, VIJAYAPUR.

I.F.T.No:EE/PWD/VJP/PB/5054-MDR-Bridge/2025-26/5501

Dated:20.03.2026

SHORT TERM TENDER NOTIFICATION

(E-Procurement) (Pre-Qualification Tender)

The- **Executive Engineer, Public Works Dept. Division, Vijayapur** Invites tenders from eligible tenderers (registered in Public Work Department) 01 work, As per standard bid documents KW-6 (Joint-Venture) with head of accounts 5054-03-101-0-02-132 (MDR Bridge) and **Work Indent-PWD : 2025-26/PREQUAL_TENDER_NUMBER_36** costing of amount for Rs. **4450.00/-** Lakhs, and the EMD amount of Rs. **44,50,000/-** for the work. Increase in G.S.T shall not be paid in the extended period of Contract for which the contractor alone is responsible for delay as determined by the authority while granting the extension of time. The calendar events of tenders, dates are fixed as follows 1) Pre-Bid Meeting Date (Pre-Qualification Tender) : 02.04.2026 at 11.00 AM 2) Last Date for Receipt of Tenders Date (Pre-Qualification Tender) – 10.04.2026 upto 4.30 PM. 3) Opening of Technical Bid Date (Pre-Qualification Tender) -13.04.2026 at 11.00 AM Clause-3 Conditions of Standard Bid Document may be seen in Departmental Website i.e "www.kppp.karnataka.gov.in" and for more information may contact help desk Bangalore (Phone No. 918025501216 & 918025501227) or office of the undersigned.

Sd/- Executive Engineer, PWD Division, Vijayapur

ವಾಸಾಸಂಇ/ವಿಜಯಪುರ/834/ಕೆಎಸ್.ಎಂಪಿಎ/2025–26

QUICK READ

170 custodial deaths reported nationwide in 2026

NEW DELHI

170 custodial deaths were reported across the country between January 1 and March 15, 2026. The data, shared by the Ministry of Home Affairs based on reports from the National Human Rights Commission, shows an increase compared to last year's 140 cases. Bihar recorded the highest number with 19 deaths, followed by Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Several smaller states and Union Territories reported no cases, while overall figures indicate a rising trend this year.

TN Polls: EVMs dispatched under tight security

CHENNAI

Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were dispatched under strict security in Ranipet and Erode districts as part of election preparations. In Ranipet, machines for four Assembly constituencies were sent from a warehouse in Arcot under the supervision of Election Officer Chandrakala, with political party representatives present. The sealed storage was opened, and machines were checked before dispatch.

In Erode, EVMs for eight constituencies were verified at the Revenue Divisional Office and then transported in GPS-enabled vehicles to strong rooms. Armed police were deployed throughout to ensure safety and transparency.

Pulwama cops arrest drug peddler, seize contraband

SRINAGAR

Police in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district arrested a suspected drug peddler and seized 771 grams of contraband during a naka checking operation on Tuesday. The action took place at Tengpona Road near Women's Degree College.

According to police, the accused, identified as Mohd Arif Malik from Malikpora, was stopped while carrying a nylon bag. On checking, officials recovered a charas or ganja-like substance from his possession.

A case has been registered under the NDPS Act, and further investigation is in progress. Police urged the public to share information on drug activities.

Gujarat govt tables UCC Bill in assembly

Bill proposes common law for marriage, divorce and live-in relationships; if passed, Gujarat will become the second state after Uttarakhand to bring in such a law

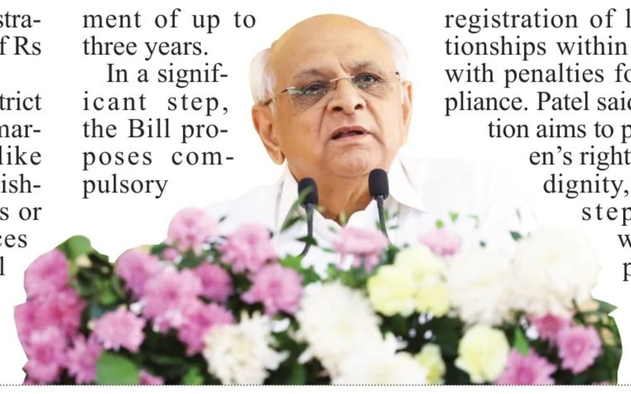
GANDHINAGAR

The Gujarat government introduced a Uniform Civil Code Bill aiming to create common civil laws statewide.

Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel tabled the Gujarat Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill, 2026, in the State Assembly on Tuesday during the final days of the budget session. The Bill seeks to establish a single legal framework for matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and live-in relationships for all residents of the state.

The move comes after a committee report was submitted last week, drawing public and political attention. While presenting the Bill, the Chief Minister highlighted its focus on legal protection and gender justice. He stated that failure to complete required registrations could attract a fine of Rs 10,000.

The Bill also includes strict provisions on multiple marriages, with offences like cheating and bigamy punishable by up to seven years or more in prison. Divorces obtained outside the legal court process will be considered invalid and may lead to imprisonment of up to three years.



In a significant step, the Bill proposes compulsory registration of live-in relationships within one month, with penalties for non-compliance. Patel said the legislation aims to protect women's rights and ensure dignity, calling it a step towards women empowerment.

The draft law is based on recommendations by a committee headed by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Desai. While it seeks uniformity, it keeps exemptions for groups with constitutionally protected customs.

The Bill will now undergo detailed discussion and clause-by-clause review in the Assembly, where debates are expected on its provisions and constitutional aspects.

Rahul Gandhi slams govt over foreign policy

NEW DELHI

Congress leader criticises Centre's foreign policy, raises concerns over global role, economic impact, and reports of Pakistan mediating sensitive international talks.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday strongly criticised the Centre's handling of the West Asia situation, calling India's foreign policy a "universal joke." He alleged that the country has been sidelined in global discussions, especially amid reports that Pakistan could help facilitate talks between Iran and the United States.

Gandhi targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi, claiming India's foreign policy is driven by personal decisions rather than national interest. He also referred to former US President Donald Trump, saying global leaders are aware of the Prime Minister's limitations. He further alleged that if the Prime Minister is "compromised," then the country's foreign policy is also affected. The Congress leader criticised the Prime Minister's recent Lok Sabha speech, calling it irrelevant and lacking clarity on India's position. He said there was no clear direction on key global issues. Gandhi also warned that ongoing tensions in West Asia could impact common people through rising prices of LPG, petrol, and fertilisers.

He linked the situation to past crises, stating that lessons from the COVID-19 period have not been understood. Earlier, speaking in Vadodara, Gandhi claimed the Prime Minister avoided naming the United States directly and accused him of being under external influence.

Meanwhile, in his Lok Sabha address, Modi described the West Asia conflict as worrying and highlighted its economic and security impact on India. He stressed the need for peace and stability, while US officials said reports of talks being mediated through Pakistan remain unconfirmed.

Trump remarks signal possible Iran war de-escalation: Sajjanhar

NEW DELHI

Former diplomat Ashok Sajjanhar on Tuesday said recent remarks by Donald Trump may indicate a possible easing of tensions with Iran.

He noted that initial goals of the US and Israel in the ongoing conflict may not have been fully achieved.

Sajjanhar said Trump appears to be facing both domestic and global pressure, including rising inflation, high fuel prices, and opposition to military action. He also pointed to the upcoming US midterm elections as a factor influencing the shift in tone.

Trump recently announced a five-day pause on planned strikes against Iranian energy infrastructure, citing "productive conversations" with Iran. The decision depends on the outcome of ongoing discussions aimed at resolving hostilities in West Asia.

The conflict, which began on February 28, has raised global concerns over energy supply disruptions, especially through the Strait of Hormuz, a key route for oil and gas transport. Earlier, Trump had warned Iran of severe consequences if it failed to keep the route open. In response, Iran threatened to target regional energy infrastructure if attacked.

Sajjanhar also dismissed reports of Pakistan acting as a mediator in the talks, stating that it lacks the trust of both sides and has limited diplomatic influence.

He added that traditional mediators like Oman and Qatar have remained less active despite the crisis.

The situation continues to remain tense, though recent developments suggest a possible diplomatic opening to reduce conflict and stabilise global energy markets.

MP LoP urges CM to extend farm loan deadline

BHOPAL

Farmers in Madhya Pradesh face financial stress, prompting opposition leaders to seek urgent relief measures.

Leader of Opposition Umang Singhar on Tuesday wrote to Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, urging him to extend the farmers' loan repayment deadline to April 30 and increase wheat procurement price to Rs 3,000 per quintal.

In his letter, Singhar said farmers are going through a serious financial crisis and need immediate support from the government. He pointed out that wheat procurement in the state begins on April 1 through agencies like the Food Corporation of India and cooperative societies, while the current loan repayment deadline is March 31.

This timing puts farmers under pressure to repay loans before they can sell their produce. Singhar noted that earlier the deadline was April 30, allowing farmers time to sell crops and clear debts. However, after it was changed to March 31 last year, many farmers failed to repay on time and were declared defaulters.

He demanded that the government restore April 30 as the permanent deadline for loan repayment. He also called for relief measures, including loan waivers or special concessions, for farmers who became defaulters due to the deadline change.

Indian Army opens unique Border Brew Cafe in AP

ITANAGAR

The Indian Army has opened a unique Border Brew Cafe in Zemithang to boost tourism and local livelihoods.

The café has been set up under Indian Army's Operation Sadbhavna, focusing on community development in remote border areas of Arunachal Pradesh. It is specially aimed at supporting the local Monpa tribal community by creating job opportunities and promoting tourism.

What makes the café special is its construction on a decommissioned Bailey Bridge over the Nyamjang Chu river.

\This creative idea combines old infrastructure with modern use, making it a rare attraction in the Northeast. Officials said the café is expected to become a popular stop for tourists visiting the scenic border region.

The project was completed in just 31 days, showing quick planning and strong coordination by the Army. Local people have been involved in running the café, helping them earn income and showcase their culture and traditions to visitors.

The initiative reflects the aim of Operation Sadbhavna, which focuses on building trust between civilians and the Army while improving living conditions in border areas.

The opening ceremony saw participation from local residents, officials, and Army personnel, marking an important step for the region's development.

Earlier this month, the Army also organised a one-month bakery training programme in Menchuka to help locals learn skills and improve their livelihood opportunities in remote areas.

UP govt clarifies non-binding nature of Puch AI MoU

LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government has clarified that its MoU with Puch AI is only preliminary and non-binding.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath shared a statement on X, saying such agreements are initial steps and do not guarantee project approval or execution. The clarification follows concerns over the start-up's ability to handle large-scale projects.

Puch AI, a relatively new firm with reported annual revenue below Rs 50 lakh, has faced questions about its financial strength, infrastructure, and experience. The company's founder has also drawn attention earlier for unusual claims, including a proposal to acquire AI firm Perplexity AI, reportedly valued at around $20 billion.

The government said that MoUs signed through Invest UP are meant to explore opportunities in emerging sectors like artificial intelligence. It stressed that these agreements are not final commitments and will undergo detailed checks before any approval is granted.

Officials added that all proposals will be reviewed based on financial capacity, technical expertise, and long-term feasibility. Any investor failing to meet these standards will see their MoU automatically cancelled.

Reaffirming its stand, the state government said it remains committed to transparency, accountability, and responsible development.

It added that strict evaluation processes are in place to ensure that only capable investors move forward, while protecting public interest in fast-growing sectors like AI.

'Nothing suspicious in Kochi drone filming case'

KOCHI

Police in Kochi said there is no immediate suspicion in a drone filming incident involving two US nationals near a naval base.

According to police, the individuals, identified as Katie Michelle Phelps and Christopher, were detained and later released after questioning at Fort Kochi. A case was registered against them for filming visuals near INS Dronacharya and the Coast Guard headquarters.

During interrogation, the duo claimed they are YouTubers and were recording content for their channel. Police said initial verification of their statements and digital data did not reveal any suspicious links or activities.

The incident had raised concerns due to the sensitive nature of defence installations along Kerala's coastline. Filming such areas without permission violates strict security rules, leading to immediate action by authorities.

Officials said a detailed investigation is still underway. Authorities are examining the footage captured, the drone used, and the travel history of the individuals. Their online platforms are also being checked to confirm their claims.Police are verifying whether similar recordings were made elsewhere and if any sensitive visuals were shared online. While no immediate threat has been found, officials said legal action may still be taken depending on final findings.

The case highlights concerns over misuse of drones by tourists and content creators. Authorities have urged strict adherence to rules, especially near sensitive and strategic locations.

Drone Filming Incident in Kochi Under Probe

In Kochi, police found no immediate threat in a drone filming case involving two US nationals near a naval facility. The individuals, Katie Michelle Phelps and Christopher, were detained and later released after questioning at Fort Kochi. A case was filed for recording visuals near INS Dronacharya and the Coast Guard headquarters.

BLUE ECONOMY BLUES

MAHA GOVT CRACKS DOWN ON ILLEGAL LED FISHING

MUMBAI

Maharashtra Fisheries Minister Nitesh Rane on Tuesday announced a complete ban on illegal LED fishing in the Konkan region, stressing strict enforcement to protect marine life and traditional fishermen.

Speaking in the Assembly, Rane said the government has adopted a zero-tolerance policy and will not give in to pressure from neighbouring states like Gujarat or Goa. He said authorities have already taken strong action, with around 2,000 cases related to LED fishing out of 4,053 enforcement drives conducted recently. Boats violating rules will continue to be seized.

The minister also warned of strict action against officials found supporting or ignoring such illegal practices. He said the aim is to protect marine resources and ensure fair opportunities for local fishing communities.

To support economic growth in the Konkan region, Rane announced several projects. These include setting up a Fisheries University at Devgad in Sindhudurg, a fish seed sub-centre at Vengurla with an investment of Rs 60 crore, and major improvements in water transport with a budget of Rs 6,600 crore, especially in Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts. Rane also raised concerns over rising fuel costs affecting fishermen. He said he has written to the Centre to change the classification of fishing cooperatives so they can get fuel at lower retail rates instead of higher bulk prices.

He further suggested Direct Benefit Transfer support to reduce the burden caused by global fuel price rise. The minister added that Maharashtra aims to become a key hub for shipbuilding and repair in the country.

KEY POINTS

- Maharashtra bans LED fishing
- Announces fisheries projects
- Zero-tolerance policy on illegal LED fishing
- 2000 enforcement actions against LED boats
- New Fisheries University at Devgad
- Rs 60 crore fish seed centre at Vengurla
- Rs 6600 crore for water transport.

QUICK READ

EU-Australia seal historic free trade deal

Canberra

The European Union and Australia have concluded a long-awaited Free Trade Agreement, announced by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen alongside Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. The deal, years in the making, aims to boost trade across continents, offering EU exporters, producers, and farmers €1 billion in tariff savings and a projected 33 percent rise in exports to Australia over the next decade. The agreement includes protections for European agricultural products, expanded critical minerals cooperation, and plans for joint projects in rare earths, lithium, and tungsten. Talks will also begin on Australia joining the Horizon Europe research programme.

HRW reports Iran targeted civilian ships at Strait

Beirut

Human Rights Watch has claimed that Iranian forces deliberately attacked at least two civilian commercial vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, potentially amounting to war crimes. The Safesea Vishnu and Mayuree Naree were hit, causing casualties, including one Indian crew member. The International Maritime Organisation confirmed 17 incidents affecting commercial ships between March 1–17. HRW noted Iran's public statements threatening oil passage and targeting vessels, despite them being civilian. Multiple videos and official reports corroborated the attacks. The situation highlights rising risks for maritime safety and underlines potential violations of international humanitarian law in the strategic waterway.

Photo exhibit exposes press freedom decline Pakistan

Geneva

A photo exhibition on press freedom violations in Pakistan drew attention during the 61st UN Human Rights Council session. Organized by the ECO-FAWN Society near the Broken Chair Monument, it displayed posters reading "Journalists under attack in Pakistan" and "Press freedom under threat in Pakistan." The exhibit documented harassment, detention, and intimidation of journalists, highlighting concerns about media safety and democratic values, and urging the international community to push for stronger protections and accountability from global authorities worldwide.

WEST ASIA TENSIONS

'Iran's supreme leader Mojtaba agrees for US talks'

This potential breakthrough comes as the conflict between the US, Israel, and Iran enters its fourth week, offering a rare glimmer of hope for peace.

RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA

In a stunning diplomatic twist, Iran's new Supreme Leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, is reportedly ready to begin direct negotiations with the United States.

According to reports from Israeli and Arab media, high-level discussions have already involved Iran's Foreign Minister and U.S. representatives. This potential breakthrough comes as the conflict between the US, Israel, and Iran enters its fourth week, offering a rare glimmer of hope for peace.

U.S. President Donald Trump described the initial talks as "very good and productive," noting that the participants are acting in a "reasonable" manner. To show good faith, the U.S. has announced a temporary pause on military strikes targeting Iran's vital energy infrastructure. This "diplomatic timeout" is intended to give both sides space to reach a deal that could prevent a full-scale regional disaster.

A major part of the discussion involves the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most important oil shipping route. President Trump suggested a bold new plan: if talks succeed, the U.S. and Iran could "jointly control" the waterway. This would secure the passage of nearly 20 million barrels of oil daily—about a quarter of the world's sea trade—and stabilize global fuel prices that have been rocked by the recent violence.

While Iran's Foreign Ministry previously denied any contact with Washington, the shift in "tenor and tone" suggests a serious change in strategy under the new leadership. As the world watches closely, these secret meetings could either end a month of bloodshed or serve as a brief pause in an escalating global crisis.

Israel strikes Lebanon after Tehran missile attack

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL

Israel has launched a series of intense military strikes against Hezbollah targets in Lebanon following a direct missile hit on central Tel Aviv.

The Iranian missile, packed with 100 kilograms of explosives, injured six people and scattered dangerous debris across the city and nearby Rosh Ha'ayin. Emergency teams are currently working through the night to clear wreckage and help families affected by the blast.

In response, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) targeted the "Radwan Force," an elite intelligence unit in Beirut, and destroyed a Hezbollah broadcasting station. These actions are part of "Operation Roaring Lion," a massive military campaign that has already seen over 3,000 strikes. Israel also reported hitting more than 50 facilities tied to Iran's Revolutionary Guard. The violence is spreading quickly, with reports of explosions in Baghdad and fires at fuel stations in southern Lebanon.

The human cost is rising as hospitals in Iran are evacuated and civilians in Lebanon flee their homes. The conflict has moved beyond just missiles, as damaged energy infrastructure in the Gulf now threatens global fuel supplies. This chaos comes at a confusing time for diplomacy; while the rockets fly, Iran's Supreme Leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, surprisingly hinted he might be ready to talk with the United States.

For now, the balance between war and peace remains incredibly fragile. World leaders are watching closely, fearing that the constant back-and-forth attacks will lead to a much larger disaster that could destabilize the entire region for years to come.

CHINA CALLS FOR CEASEFIRE

BEIJING, CHINA

China has issued a firm call for an immediate end to the fighting in Iran, warning that a long-term war would bring disaster to everyone involved. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian expressed Beijing's deep worry over how the crisis could spread across West Asia. He urged all nations to stop the violence and return to the talking table before the situation spirals out of control.

"A long conflict in Iran serves no one's interests," Lin stated during a press briefing. He argued that history proves military force never truly solves deep-rooted problems and often only creates more hatred. This statement comes at a critical moment, following reports that the United States decided to delay planned strikes on Iranian power plants to give diplomacy a small window of time to work.

China is particularly concerned about how this instability is rocking the global economy. Lin pointed out that the chaos is already hurting international trade, shipping, and energy prices. Because the Middle East is a central hub for the world's fuel and finance, a total breakdown in peace threatens the shared interests of every nation on Earth, not just those in the immediate region.

In a direct plea, Beijing asked all sides to "press the pause button" on military moves. Reaffirming its role as a global peacemaker, China pledged to keep working as a mediator to help reach a ceasefire. As the world watches closely, China's message is clear: dialogue is the only safe way out of this dangerous standoff.

Indian gas tankers safely cross war-hit Hormuz

OMAN

Two Indian ships carrying critical supplies of cooking gas have successfully navigated the high-stakes Strait of Hormuz.

The vessels, named Jag Vasant and Pine Gas, are transporting over 92,600 metric tonnes of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG). Their safe passage through this narrow gateway between the Persian Gulf and the open ocean is a major win for India's energy security during a time of global tension.

The journey required intense coordination. The Pine Gas was seen carefully moving through the sensitive waterway, manned by a dedicated Indian crew. Together with the Jag Vasant, the two ships carry a combined total of 60 Indian seafarers. These tankers were part of a group of 22 Indian-flagged vessels previously stranded in the Gulf due to rising regional conflicts. They are expected to dock at Indian ports between March 26 and 28.

Government officials confirmed that these shipments follow the successful arrival of two other tankers, which delivered enough gas to power the entire country for a full day. Shipping Secretary Rajesh Kumar Sinha emphasized that while the fuel is vital, the safety of the sailors remains the top priority until every remaining stranded ship is brought home.

Amidst these maritime worries, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reassured the nation that India's energy reserves are at record highs. With over 53 lakh metric tonnes of oil stored in strategic reserves, the country is well-prepared for any supply disruptions. This successful transit highlights India's ability to keep the lights on and kitchens running despite international uncertainty.

Dhaka fuel crisis shuts down petrol stations

DHAKA, BANGLADESH

Drivers in Dhaka are facing a desperate scramble for fuel as several petrol stations across the capital were forced to shut their gates. A severe shortage of petrol and octane has left many pumps empty, causing long queues, chaotic scenes, and growing frustration among motorists who are finding it nearly impossible to fill their tanks.

Aminul Islam, an assistant manager at one major station, explained that the shutdown was caused by simple banking delays. Because banks were closed when payments were due, the fuel deliveries were stalled. Although the money has since been processed, the tankers have yet to arrive. This administrative hiccup, combined with a wider national shortage, has brought parts of the city's transport to a standstill.

The crisis is being fueled by the ongoing conflict in West Asia, which has disrupted global oil supplies. The Bangladesh Petrol Pump Owners' Association warned that the amount of fuel provided by the state-run corporation is far below what the city actually needs. With millions of motorcyclists and drivers waiting for hours in the heat, tensions are boiling over, leading to frequent arguments between exhausted pump workers and angry customers.

Station owners are now calling on the government to take urgent action to secure more fuel and protect staff from the rising unrest. Until the supply chain stabilizes, residents of Dhaka face a grim period of uncertainty, with no clear timeline on when the pumps will stay open long enough to meet the city's massive demand.

BUREAUCRACY STALLS VITAL REFORMS FOR PAK COTTON

LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Pakistan's mission to save its struggling cotton industry has hit a massive roadblock. A long-planned merger between two key agricultural research groups, the PCCC and PARC, is currently gathering dust on government desks.

Although the move received legal clearance earlier this month, officials have yet to take the final steps to make the partnership official, leaving the country's "white gold" in jeopardy.

The goal of the merger is simple: combine resources to jumpstart scientific research and help farmers grow more cotton. While the Ministry of Law gave the green light on March 4, the Ministry of National Food Security has not moved forward. This delay is part of a larger pattern, as the plan was originally approved over a year ago with a deadline that passed in mid-2025.

Local farming leaders are losing patience. Khalid Mahmood Khokhar, head of a major farmers' union, criticized the bureaucracy for focusing more on office perks than on actual field research. Meanwhile, a bitter money dispute complicates things further. Textile mills stopped paying a mandatory research fee years ago, claiming the funds were being misused for administrative salaries rather than better seeds.

Experts warn that without this merger, Pakistan's cotton sector will continue to fall behind. Even with direct orders from top government leaders to hurry the process, nothing has changed. This standoff highlights the deep struggle within Pakistan to fix its broken systems, leaving both the textile industry and ordinary farmers waiting for a solution that seems stuck in endless paperwork.

SUDOKU

Brain-Bender: Can You Solve It?

	1	5		9		3		
7			9		1		2	8
	6	3		7		9		
4			9		2		5	7
	3			8		6		
5		2	6		1		3	9
	5			2		4		
1		4	8		3		9	5
	9			1		2		

9	1	5	3	6	2	8	7	4
3	8	4	5	9	7	1	6	2
7	6	2	1	4	8	9	5	3
5	7	3	9	8	6	4	2	1
6	9	8	4	2	1	5	3	7
4	2	1	7	3	5	6	8	9
8	4	7	6	1	3	2	9	5
2	5	9	9	7	4	3	1	6
1	3	6	2	5	9	7	4	8

Solutions to Yesterday's puzzle

Fill a 9×9 grid with numbers so that each row, column and 3×3 section contain all of the digits between 1 and 9.

RIGHTS UNDER FIRE!

Panjgur abduction sparks fear over Baloch security

BALOCHISTAN, PAKISTAN

The recent abduction of a young man in the Panjgur district has ignited a fresh wave of alarm across Balochistan.

Witnesses report that the victim, identified as Abdullah, was forcibly taken from the Isa locality by unidentified armed men. With no legal warrant provided and his current location unknown, the incident has intensified long-standing fears regarding the safety of civilians and the breakdown of law and order in the province.

Local residents and human rights activists suspect that the abductors belong to a state-backed militia, often referred to as a "death squad." While the government officially denies that such groups exist, locals claim they operate with quiet support to carry out kidnappings and intimidation. Similar cases have been reported in nearby areas like Kech and Turbat, suggesting a terrifying pattern of "enforced disappearances" that has haunted the region for nearly two decades.

In response, Pakistani authorities have dismissed these claims, insisting that all security operations follow strict legal guidelines. They maintain that only formal military and police forces are active in the region. However, these reassurances offer little comfort to the families of the missing, who argue that their loved ones are being detained without any access to a fair trial or legal help.

This latest disappearance adds to a growing list of unresolved cases in Balochistan, where the silence from officials is often as deafening as the abductions themselves. As the community waits for news on Abdullah's safety, the incident serves as a grim reminder of the deep-seated tensions and the urgent need for true accountability.

Pakistan tops world pollution rankings in 2025

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan was ranked the world's most polluted country in 2025, with PM2.5 levels up to 13 times above WHO guidelines, according to Swiss monitoring firm IQAir. Bangladesh and Tajikistan followed in second and third place. Only 13 countries met safe air standards, while global city compliance fell to 14 percent. Wildfires in Canada worsened air quality in parts of the US and Europe. Some nations, like Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Mongolia, saw improvements. Meanwhile, Pakistan also recorded 1,139 terrorism deaths, the highest since 2013, due to activity from TTP and BLA, highlighting both environmental and security challenges facing the country.

FANS' GROUP SUES FIFA OVER 'EXCESSIVE' WORLD CUP 2026 TICKET PRICES

Complaint alleges monopoly abuse and unfair pricing for global football tournament

LAUSANNE

A leading supporters' body has filed a formal complaint against FIFA, alleging "excessive" pricing and unfair ticketing practices for the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup.

The action has been initiated by Football Supporters Europe (FSE) along with Euroconsumers, with the complaint submitted to the European Commission. The groups argue that FIFA has exploited its monopoly over ticket sales to impose inflated prices and restrictive purchasing conditions on fans.

In a statement, FSE claimed that ticket costs for the 2026 final, scheduled for July 19, are significantly higher than those for previous editions. The cheapest available tickets for the final are reportedly priced at $4,185—more than seven times the cost of the

least expensive tickets for the 2022 final in Qatar.

The group also highlighted disparities with other major tournaments, noting that tickets for the UEFA Euro 2024 final were available for as low as 95 euros. Furthermore, FIFA's original bid documents had projected an average ticket price of $1,408, a figure that critics say has been far exceeded.

According to FIFA, nearly seven million tickets have been made available for the tournament, which will be co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico. The 2026 edition will be the first to feature 48 teams and will include a total of 104 matches, increasing demand for high-profile fixtures.

FSE also pointed out that while early proposals had suggested ticket prices could start as low as $21, the cheapest options currently available are around $60, with most matches involving top teams costing upwards of $200.

Concerns have also been raised about resale prices on FIFA's official platform, where some tickets for the final at MetLife Stadium have been listed at exorbitant rates, reaching as high as $143,750—over 40 times their original face value. The complaint underscores growing frustration among fans over affordability and transparency, with the outcome of the case likely to have wider implications for ticketing policies in global sporting events.

Vinicius double powers Real Madrid past Atletico in thrilling derby

MADRID

Vinicius Junior struck twice as Real Madrid staged a spirited comeback to defeat Atletico Madrid 3-2 in a pulsating LaLiga derby at the Santiago Bernabeu.

In what was expected to be a relatively subdued Madrid derby, the contest instead delivered high drama, five goals and a late red card, keeping Real firmly in the title race, just four points behind leaders Barcelona.

Atletico drew first blood in the 33rd minute through Ademola Lookman, who finished off a swift counter-attack involving Matteo Ruggeri and a clever backheel from Giuliano Simeone. The visitors looked composed as they took a deserved lead into the break.

Real responded strongly after halftime, with Vinicius

equalising from the penalty spot in the 52nd minute after David Hancko fouled Brahim Diaz inside the box. Just three minutes later, captain Federico Valverde capitalised on a defensive error by Jose Maria Gimenez to put the hosts ahead.

However, Atletico refused to back down. Nahuel Molina produced a moment of brilliance in the 66th minute, unleashing a stunning long-range strike to level the scores and silence the Bernabeu crowd.

Vinicius then took centre stage, restoring Real's lead in the 72nd minute with a dazzling solo effort, cutting in from the left before firing an unstoppable shot past the goalkeeper.

The match took another twist late on when Valverde was shown a straight red card for a reckless challenge, reducing Real to 10 men. Atletico pushed hard for an equaliser, with Julian Alvarez coming close, but the hosts held firm under pressure.

Speaking after the match, Vinicius expressed satisfaction with the team's performance, stating that Real remained composed despite conceding first and executed their game plan effectively.

The victory strengthens Real Madrid's title push, while Atletico, currently fourth, continue to endure an inconsistent league campaign despite showing resilience in the derby.

Mikaela Shiffrin nears sixth title with dominant slalom run

HAFJELL

Mikaela Shiffrin produced a commanding performance in the opening run of a crucial World Cup slalom, putting herself in prime position to secure a record-equalling sixth overall title.

The American star, widely regarded as the most successful slalom skier in World Cup history, surged into the lead with a massive advantage of 1.10 seconds on an unusually long and demanding course. Shiffrin clocked just over one minute and seven seconds to navigate the challenging layout of 77 turning gates, underlining her technical superiority.

Heading into the race, Shiffrin held a 45-point lead over Germany's Emma Aicher in the overall standings. Aicher managed the fourth-fastest time in the first run but trailed significantly by 1.38 seconds, leaving her with a steep task in the second run.

If the current standings hold, Shiffrin would collect 100 points from the event, extending her overall lead to 95 points ahead of the season-ending giant slalom. In that scenario, Aicher would need to win the final race — a discipline where her best career finish is fourth — while hoping Shiffrin fails to score, a highly unlikely outcome.

Any top-15 finish for Shiffrin in the concluding race would be enough to secure the overall title, further strengthening her legacy in the sport.

Araujo header, Garcia brilliance guide Barcelona to narrow win over Rayo

BARCELONA

FC Barcelona maintained their grip on the LaLiga top spot with a hard-earned 1-0 victory over Rayo Vallecano, thanks to a first-half strike from Ronald Araujo and a stellar display by goalkeeper Joan Garcia.

Barcelona now lead the standings with 73 points, seven clear of second-placed Real Madrid, who have a game in hand. The win strengthens their position in the title race as they aim to defend their LaLiga crown.

The decisive moment came in the 24th minute when Araujo rose above the defence to head home a pinpoint cross from Joao Cancelo. The Uruguayan defender directed the ball in off the post, giving the hosts an early advantage after a dominant start.

Barcelona nearly doubled their lead soon after, with Raphinha going close on two occasions. The Brazilian first missed a one-on-one chance and later saw his curling effort tipped onto the crossbar by Rayo goalkeeper Augusto Batalla.

Despite Barcelona's control in the opening half, Rayo Vallecano mounted a strong comeback after the break, testing the hosts with quick counter-attacks and sustained pressure.

Garcia, however, proved to be the difference-maker. The young goalkeeper produced a series of outstanding saves, beginning with an early stop to deny Carlos Martin. He continued to frustrate Rayo's attackers, including crucial interventions against Alvaro Garcia and Isi Palazon during a tense second half.

Rayo's best chance came late in the match when Pacha Espino found himself through on goal, only to miss the target under pressure. Garcia then sealed his man-of-the-match performance with a vital save to deny Jorge de Frutos in the closing minutes.

Barcelona manager Hansi Flick praised Garcia's contribution, calling him outstanding and pivotal to the victory.

The narrow win keeps Barcelona firmly on course in the title race, while Rayo were left to rue missed opportunities despite an impressive second-half display.

Asian Squash Championship postponed due to regional tensions

KARACHI

In Karachi, officials confirmed that the Asian Team Squash Championship, scheduled in Islamabad next month, has been postponed due to ongoing Gulf region tensions. The event, set for April 14–18, was to feature top Asian squash nations.

The Asian Squash Federation said prevailing security concerns and logistical challenges made it unfeasible to proceed. A senior Pakistan Squash Federation official noted that despite full preparations, instability forced the delay.

He added the federation remains open to hosting later, possibly in September, if conditions improve. The Asian body is coordinating with member nations regarding participation.

The postponement reflects how geopolitical tensions continue disrupting international sport, with safety and travel concerns taking priority over fixed schedules.

Rampant East Bengal dominate from start, climb to fourth with emphatic win

East Bengal thrash Mohammedan Sporting 7-0 in one-sided ISL clash

KOLKATA

East Bengal FC produced a dominant display to hammer Mohammedan Sporting Club 7-0 in their ISL encounter at the Salt Lake Stadium, registering one of the most emphatic wins of the season.

The home side asserted control right from the opening whistle and took the lead as early as the seventh minute through Anwar Ali, who unleashed a powerful long-range strike that left the opposition stunned. Mohammedan Sporting struggled to cope with East Bengal's relentless attacking play, and defensive lapses soon proved costly.

The pressure told as East Bengal earned three penalties during the match. Spanish striker Youssef Ezzejjari converted two of them in

the 13th and 54th minutes, while Saul Crespo added another from the spot in the 37th minute, effectively putting the contest beyond reach before halftime.

Mohammedan Sporting's woes deepened when winger Joseph Lalmuanawma was sent off in the 35th minute after receiving his second yellow card, reducing the visitors to 10 men. With a numerical disadvantage, they were forced into a defensive shell as East Bengal continued to press forward.

The second half followed a similar pattern, with East Bengal maintaining complete control. P. V. Vishnu extended the lead in the 74th minute, capitalising on sustained pressure. Anwar Ali then grabbed his second goal of the match in the 78th minute, heading home from a corner to underline his impressive performance.

Substitute Nandhakumar Sekar completed the rout deep into stoppage time, sealing a comprehensive victory for the hosts.

With this result, East Bengal climbed to fourth place in the standings with 11 points from six matches, boosting their playoff hopes. In contrast, Mohammedan Sporting remain rooted at the bottom of the table without a point, facing an uphill battle to revive their campaign.

Virginia reaches Sweet Sixteen after double-OT thriller

IOWA CITY

Virginia Cavaliers women's basketball created history by becoming the first First Four team to reach the Sweet Sixteen, defeating Iowa Hawkeyes women's basketball 83-75 in a gripping double-overtime clash in the NCAA Tournament.

Tenth-seeded Virginia capped a remarkable run with their third win in five days, showcasing resilience and composure under pressure. Leading the charge was Kymora Johnson, who delivered a standout performance with

28 points, including 14 crucial points across the two overtime periods.

Virginia had entered the tournament through the First Four, edging past Arizona State before defeating Georgia in overtime in the first round. Their victory over second-seeded Iowa, in front of a packed home crowd, marked a historic milestone and their first appearance in the tournament's second weekend since 2000.

Coach Amaka Agugua-Hamilton praised her team's mental strength, highlighting their ability to remain composed despite repeated challenges from a formidable Iowa side. "Every time they punched, we punched back," she said, reflecting the team's unwavering belief throughout the contest.

The game itself was a high-intensity battle, with Iowa having multiple chances to seal victory in regulation and the first overtime. However, missed opportunities, including a last-second jumper and late attempts in overtime, proved costly.

Virginia capitalised on those moments, with key contributions from Paris Clark, who added 20 points, while Romi Levy and Caitlin Weimar chipped in with valuable support.

RCB TO HONOUR STAMPEDE VICTIMS WITH JERSEY NO. 11, MEMORIAL SEATS

BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) will pay tribute to victims of the 2025 Bengaluru stampede by adopting symbolic gestures, including players wearing jersey No. 11 during practice sessions and dedicating permanent seats at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

The initiative commemorates 11 fans who lost their lives in a tragic stampede on June 4, 2025, which occurred during celebrations following RCB's maiden Indian Premier League title victory. The incident had drawn widespread criticism over crowd management and safety arrangements as massive gatherings overwhelmed the city.

Speaking on the tribute plans, RCB CEO Rajesh Menon said that players will

wear jersey No. 11 during practice sessions held on match days. Although the number will not be used during official matches, it is intended as a symbolic gesture to honour the memory of the deceased fans.

In addition, players will wear black armbands on designated match days as a mark of respect. The franchise also plans to establish 11 permanent seats within the stadium, ensuring a lasting tribute to the victims. "This is for the 11 fans who will be with us forever," Menon said, underlining the emotional significance of the initiative.

RCB, the defending champions, are set to begin their IPL 2026 campaign at home on March 28 against Sunrisers Hyderabad. The match will carry added emotional weight as it marks the team's return to the venue closely associated with the tragic incident.

The franchise is also scheduled to play a majority of its home fixtures in Bengaluru, while a couple of matches will be hosted at the Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Cricket Stadium in Raipur.

The move reflects an effort by the team to acknowledge the tragedy and maintain a connection with its supporters, while promoting a message of responsibility and remembrance. As the new season begins, RCB's tribute is expected to resonate deeply with fans, serving as a solemn reminder of the importance of safety in large public events.

Bhambri, Venus bow out after narrow first-round loss in Miami Open

MIAMI

India's Yuki Bhambri and his New Zealand partner Michael Venus suffered a hard-fought first-round exit at the Miami Open, going down in a closely contested doubles match on Tuesday.

The Indo-Kiwi pair lost 6-4, 5-7, 13-15 to the Australian-Dutch combination of John-Patrick Smith and Sander Arends in the round of 32. The match, lasting one hour and 52 minutes, was a tightly balanced affair that could have swung either way.

Bhambri and Venus started strongly, taking the opening set 6-4 with solid baseline play and effective net presence. However, their opponents responded well in the second set, edging it 7-5 to force a decisive match tiebreak.

In the super tiebreak, both teams exchanged leads in a

tense battle. Despite holding their nerve for long stretches, Bhambri and Venus were unable to close out the contest, eventually losing 13-15 in a nail-biting finish.

Statistically, there was little to separate the two pairs. Smith and Arends converted two of their four break-point opportunities, while Bhambri and Venus were equally efficient, capitalising on both chances they created. The contest marked the first meeting between the two teams, adding an element of unpredictability to the encounter.

The defeat comes shortly after Bhambri's impressive run at the Indian Wells Open, where he reached the semifinals alongside Swedish partner Andre Goransson. The 33-year-old has also enjoyed success with Venus in the past, notably reaching the semifinals of the US Open last year.

QUICK READ

Jal Jeevan Mission boosts rural water service market

New Delhi

India's Jal Jeevan Mission 2.0 is set to create a huge Rs 3 lakh crore opportunity in operations and maintenance, according to research. The focus is now shifting from building water systems to keeping them running well. The total budget has risen sharply, helping construction companies and manufacturers. The deadline to cover all rural homes has been pushed to 2028. Tap water reach has already grown to over 81 percent. Experts say better service, regular monitoring, and local village involvement will improve water supply quality and ensure long-term benefits for rural communities.

RBI may pause rates amid global oil concerns

New Delhi

The Reserve Bank of India is expected to keep interest rates unchanged in its April 6-8 policy meeting, say economists. A report suggests rising global oil prices may impact economic growth more than inflation for now. Since fuel prices have not increased yet, inflation pressure remains limited. Experts believe the central bank will focus on calming market worries and explaining its strategy. No immediate rate hike is expected. The RBI's rate-setting panel meets six times a year. In its last meeting, it kept the repo rate at 5.25 percent, citing stable inflation and steady domestic growth despite global uncertainty.

Delhi budget focuses on growth, welfare

New Delhi

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta presented a Rs 1.03 lakh crore Budget for 2026-27, focusing on development and welfare. Calling it a "Green Budget," she set aside 21 percent funds for eco projects. Plans include improving drainage with Rs 160 crore and roads with Rs 1,000 crore. New flyovers and underpasses aim to ease traffic. Housing upgrades and elderly care schemes were also announced. Women-focused steps include childcare centres, free bus travel, and 'Mahila Haats'. Funds were also allocated for slum development and canteens. The government said these steps aim to boost growth and improve daily life for people.

Operant AI unveils programme to secure AI

New Delhi

Operant AI launched a new ecosystem programme to protect India's growing AI infrastructure. The initiative adds real-time security directly into enterprise AI systems, addressing risks as AI adoption expands across finance, healthcare, and public services. India now operates over 80,000 GPUs under the IndiaAI Mission, with more added recently. Data centre and cloud providers like CtrlS, Sify, Nxtra, and Yotta are boosting capacity for AI workloads. Operant AI aims to make AI systems safer and trustworthy, giving organisations secure environments to run AI models and agents, ensuring India's AI growth is both rapid and protected.

'Govt to cut broken rice in PDS to free up ethanol feedstock'

At present, the grains distributed under PDS has 25% broken rice to be provided to 80 crore beneficiaries. Under the new plan, this would be brought down to 10%.

NEW DELHI

The Centre is set to approach the Cabinet with a proposal to reduce the allocation of broken rice in grains distributed under the public distribution system (PDS) from 25% to 10%, a move that would free roughly 90 lakh tonne of broken rice annually for the ethanol sector, Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra said on Tuesday.

Speaking at the All India Distillers' Association (AIDA) conference, Chopra said the proposal was aimed at providing the ethanol industry with a stable, year-round feedstock supply, reducing its dependence on whole grain stocks of the Food Corporation of India (FCI).

"Climate change is a reality. We need to make sure the supply chain is not disrupted. A steady supply of broken rice to the ethanol sector will help ensure that," he said.

At present, the grains distributed under PDS has 25% broken rice to be provided to 80 crore beneficiaries. Under the new plan, this would be brought down to 10%.

The surplus broken rice, drawn from the roughly 360-370 lakh tonne of rice distributed annually, would be sold through auction to ethanol producers, animal feed manufacturers and others.

A pilot has already been conducted in five states.

From next year, the government will stop supplying whole-grain FCI rice to distilleries. Broken rice from the revamped food scheme will take its place as the primary grain-based feedstock, Chopra said.

"Looking further ahead, from the next ethanol supply year, whole FCI rice will no longer be available for the sector. In its place, we are moving toward the supply of broken rice, a change that addresses multiple objectives simultaneously."

This proposal serves multiple interests at once: it improves the quality of grain received by PDS beneficiaries, eases storage and logistics pressures, and gives the ethanol sector a more stable, predictable, year-round feedstock, he said.

Oil industry pushes ethanol as cooking fuel to cut LPG dependency

NEW DELHI: The petroleum industry on Tuesday urged industry players to develop ethanol as a clean cooking fuel for Indian households as part of efforts to reduce dependence on imported LPG and expand biofuel use.

R S Ravi, Director (Downstream) at the Federation of Indian Petroleum Industry (FIPI), made the appeal while addressing the All India Distillers' Association (AIDA) conference, highlighting ongoing research into ethanol-based cooking stoves.

"A lot of work is happening" at agencies like the LPG Equipment Research Centre (LERC) and various IITs to develop ethanol-compatible and efficient cooking stoves, with prototypes likely to be ready soon, Ravi said.

He sought active support from the All India Distillers Association (IDA) and its members on two key fronts: connecting with manufacturers to scale up production of these stoves, and more importantly, developing a viable supply chain to deliver ethanol directly to households.

"This is a different ballgame. As of now, the way you are supporting the oil industry is by supplying bulk It needs to change," Ravi stated.

BHIM app adds biometric scan for payments

NEW DELHI

The BHIM payments app has just taken a massive leap toward making digital shopping faster and more secure. NPCI BHIM Services Limited announced that users can now authorize transactions using their fingerprint or facial recognition. This new biometric feature applies to all payments up to Rs 5,000, allowing millions of Indians to skip the traditional PIN entry for their daily expenses.

The update aims to solve a common headache: failed transactions caused by forgotten or mistyped PINs. Whether you are sending money to a friend, scanning a QR code at a local tea stall, or shopping online, a quick touch or glance at your phone is now all it takes. For any purchase over the Rs 5,000 limit, the app will still require a manual PIN to ensure extra safety for larger amounts.

Lalitha Nataraj, the CEO of the service, explained that this move makes digital banking feel more natural and personal. By using the security already built into modern smartphones, the app keeps sensitive data locked on the user's device rather than sharing it. This reduces the risk of someone stealing a PIN or peaking over a shoulder during a transaction.

The BHIM app now lets users authorize payments up to Rs 5,000 via fingerprint or facial recognition, making digital transactions faster, secure, and PIN-free.

Currently, the feature is live for both Android and iPhone users who have devices with biometric sensors. It marks a significant shift in how India handles small, frequent payments, moving the nation closer to a seamless, "touch-and-go" economy that prioritizes both speed and high-tech protection for every citizen.

The impact could turn significantly more severe if crude oil prices remain elevated beyond current assumptions

West Asia crisis slows India's economic growth

NEW DELHI

India's rapid economic expansion hit a speed bump this March as the ongoing conflict in West Asia triggered an unexpected energy shock. According to data, the growth in both the manufacturing and services sectors slowed down as rising fuel costs and global instability began to weigh on the nation's private sector.

The composite index, which tracks the health of the economy, dropped to 56.5 this month. While any score above 50 still indicates growth, experts noted that domestic demand has weakened significantly. Pranjul Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC, pointed out that new orders rose at their slowest pace in over three years. While exports remain strong, local businesses are struggling with "inflationary pressures" caused by the Middle East war and unstable global markets.

The report highlights a growing squeeze on business owners. The cost of raw materials and energy jumped at the fastest rate in nearly four years. To keep customers, many companies are choosing to absorb these extra costs themselves rather than passing the full bill to shoppers, which is shrinking their profit margins. Despite these hurdles, the pace of price hikes for consumers still hit a seven-month high.

Looking ahead, Indian firms remain surprisingly hopeful. Many businesses expect output to rise over the next year, banking on better marketing, new client inquiries, and improved efficiency. For now, however, the "energy shock" serves as a stark reminder of how global conflicts can directly impact the pockets of local businesses and consumers.

Indian markets, rupee set for recovery

NEW DELHI

After a turbulent week for investors, a new financial report suggests that a "smart recovery" is on the horizon for Indian markets. Experts from Emkay Global Financial Services predict that the Indian rupee will bounce back to 91 against the US dollar within the next three months. This optimism comes as the initial shock of rising oil prices begins to fade and stock market valuations become more attractive to global buyers.

The Nifty index saw a sharp 5 percent drop over the last few days, largely due to foreign investors pulling their money out. However, analysts believe this trend is about to flip. India is expected to emerge as a top investment destination in the region as market conditions normalize. Additionally, the interest rate on government bonds is projected to drop, signaling a more stable environment for the nation's economy.

The recovery depends heavily on global oil prices. The report notes that if Brent crude stays around $85 per barrel, the impact remains manageable. However, if prices soar past $100, India could face a significant trade deficit. To protect citizens from rising fuel costs at current levels, the government might need to cut fuel taxes by nearly Rs 19.5 per liter.

While challenges remain, the overall outlook is one of resilience. By absorbing some of the costs through subsidies and tax cuts, the government can help steady the ship. For now, the message to the market is clear: the worst of the recent slide may soon be behind us.

Gold, silver prices plunge amid Mideast tensions

MUMBAI

Gold and silver prices took a sharp dive as fears of a major war in West Asia began to fade.

The sudden market drop followed an announcement from the U.S. President regarding a temporary pause on potential strikes against Iran's energy infrastructure. This news lowered the demand for "safe-haven" assets, which investors typically buy during times of global conflict to protect their wealth.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold prices tumbled by over Rs 2,500, while silver saw an even steeper crash, falling by more than Rs 10,000 per kilogram. This represents a decline of nearly 5 percent for silver in a single session. Global markets mirrored this trend, with gold slipping toward $4,340 an ounce as traders reacted to the "productive conversations" reportedly held between Washington and Tehran.

Despite the optimistic tone from the U.S., the situation remains tense. Iran's parliamentary speaker dismissed the talk of negotiations as "fake news" intended to manipulate financial markets. However, the five-day delay in military action was enough to send prices sliding. Analysts suggest that the broader trend for precious metals remains weak for now.

If the current support levels break, gold could drop even further toward the Rs 1,30,000 mark. For now, the market is breathing a sigh of relief, betting on diplomacy over destruction. Investors are keeping a close watch on the next few days, as any change in the geopolitical climate could quickly send these prices swinging back up.

RAILWAYS TICKET REFORM

New railway rules target touts, refunds

NEW DELHI

Indian Railways has announced a major update to its ticket cancellation and boarding policies to stop illegal ticket blackmarketing.

These new rules, set to roll out between April 1 and April 15, 2026, aim to make the system fairer for genuine travelers while offering more freedom for last-minute station changes.

Under the revised system, the refund amount now depends strictly on when a passenger cancels. Those who cancel more than 72 hours before departure will get the highest refund. However, the penalties grow as the clock ticks down. Cancellations made between 72 and 24 hours before the trip will see a 25 percent deduction. If you wait until the 24-to-8-hour window, you lose 50 percent of the fare. Most notably, no refunds will be given for any cancellations made less than eight hours before the train leaves.

Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw explained that these tighter deadlines are necessary to stop "touts" from hoarding tickets and cancelling them at the last minute for a profit. By making late cancellations expensive, the government hopes to keep seats available for real passengers.

On a brighter note, the railway is giving passengers more flexibility with their boarding points. Travelers can now change their starting station up to 30 minutes before departure. This is a huge win for those living in large cities with multiple stations, as they can now choose the most convenient stop right before their journey begins, even after the official charts are prepared.

Railways approves key projects to boost connectivity

NEW DELHI: Indian Railways has approved projects worth Rs 648 crore in Gujarat and Bihar to improve connectivity and reduce congestion. A Rail Over Rail flyover will be built at Kosamba in Gujarat, while a new rail bypass will come up in Bhagalpur, Bihar. Officials said these projects will ensure smoother train movement and better safety. The Bhagalpur bypass will also reduce delays caused by engine reversals. The move is part of efforts to upgrade rail networks, handle rising demand, and improve overall efficiency for passengers and freight services across busy routes.

Samsung workers agree to restart pay talks

SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

Samsung Electronics and its labor unions have agreed to return to the negotiating table, potentially averting a massive strike planned for May.

A joint board representing three major unions, including the National Samsung Electronics Union, announced they would resume talks after management showed a new willingness to discuss bonus caps and wage hikes.

The breakthrough follows a high-level meeting with Samsung's CEO, Jun Young-hyun. Previously, tensions were high, with over 93 percent of the 90,000 union members voting in favor of walking off the job. Workers are demanding a 7 percent pay increase and more transparency in how performance bonuses are calculated. Currently, these bonuses are capped, a policy the unions want removed to better reflect the company's success.

The dispute had escalated to the point where union leaders planned a protest outside the chairman's private residence. However, that event was canceled after the company offered this latest olive branch. CEO Jun, who also leads the vital semiconductor division, acknowledged the workers' frustrations and promised to review their demands seriously. He noted that while the company must balance how it distributes wealth across different departments, they are open to finding a fair solution.

Formal negotiations are scheduled for this Thursday and Friday, following a preliminary meeting. For now, the tech giant and its employees are choosing dialogue over disruption. This move offers a glimmer of hope that one of the world's largest electronics makers can resolve its internal conflicts without halting production.

Ponting urges Punjab Kings to sharpen all-round fitness ahead of IPL 2026

CHANDIGARH

Punjab Kings have begun their preparations for the Indian Premier League 2026 season, with head coach Ricky Ponting delivering a clear and focused message to his squad—prioritise physical, technical and mental fitness ahead of the campaign.

Last year's runners-up, Punjab Kings (PBKS) will open their season against Gujarat Titans at New Chandigarh on March 31. The team enters the new edition with renewed determination after narrowly missing out on their maiden IPL title in 2025, where they fell short by just six runs against Royal Challengers Bengaluru in a thrilling final at Ahmedabad.

Addressing the players during the training camp, Ponting emphasised the importance of preparation and process over outcomes. He urged the squad to reflect on the qualities that made them a strong unit last season and to build on that foundation.

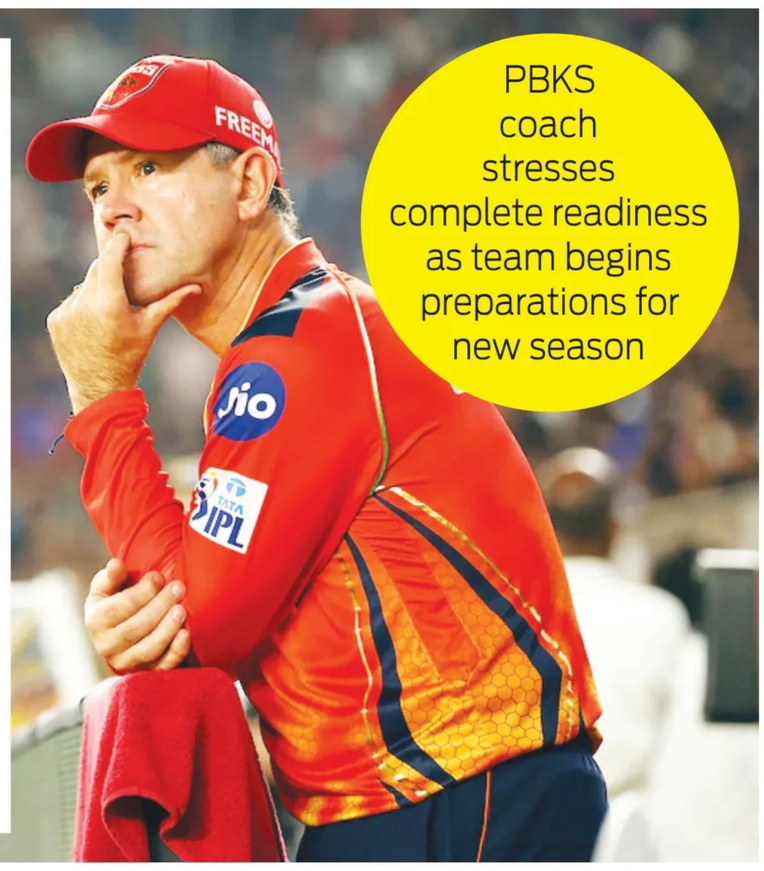
"This is training, this is preparation. It's about getting ourselves physically, technically and mentally right for that first game," Ponting said, highlighting the need for holistic readiness. He also encouraged players to stay committed to their roles and game plans, regardless of occasional setbacks.

Ponting acknowledged that mistakes are an inevitable part of the game, noting that even he would err during the course of the season. However, he stressed that errors made while sticking to a clear plan should not be viewed negatively, but rather as part of the natural flow of cricket.

Under the leadership of captain Shreyas Iyer, PBKS had emerged as one of the most consistent teams last season, showcasing a balanced combination of youth and experience.

The squad for IPL 2026 features key players such as Arshdeep Singh, Yuzvendra Chahal, Marcus Stoinis and Lockie Ferguson, among others.

With preparations underway and expectations high, Punjab Kings will be aiming to go one step further this season and secure their first-ever IPL title.



PBKS coach stresses complete readiness as team begins preparations for new season

QR tickets, free Metro rides among new measures for B'luru IPL matches

BENGALURU

In a bid to streamline crowd management and enhance fan experience, new arrangements including QR-based ticketing and free Metro travel have been introduced for matches at M Chinnaswamy Stadium during Indian Premier League 2026.

With the season set to begin on March 28, Bengaluru City Police, in coordination with Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL), Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) and Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA), has rolled out a series of measures aimed at ensuring safety, efficiency and convenience.

Police Commissioner Seemant Kumar Singh said that physical tickets have been completely eliminated this season, with entry strictly through QR-code-based digital tickets purchased online. These tickets will also double as Metro passes, allowing fans free travel on the Namma Metro without the need for separate fares. Commuters have been advised to use MG Road and Cubbon Park Metro stations, with additional trains scheduled on match days.

To manage large crowds, authorities have restricted entry points, with most access redirected to Cubbon Road where seven wide gates have been installed to facilitate smoother movement. Gates will open four hours prior to match time, and designated holding areas at nearby practice grounds will accommodate spectators before they are allowed into the stadium.

Strict traffic regulations will be enforced in surrounding areas including Queen's Road, Cubbon Road and MG Road, with no-parking rules in place.

Limited parking facilities have been arranged at select locations such as Garuda Mall, Freedom Park and nearby schools, with shuttle services operating between parking zones and the stadium.

Enhanced security measures include the deployment of 500 CCTV cameras, including AI-enabled systems to monitor crowd density in real time. Additionally, nine ambulances and four medical units have been stationed to handle emergencies.Introducing the tagline "Cheer responsibly," authorities have urged fans to cooperate with guidelines to ensure a safe and enjoyable IPL experience in the city.

Authorities introduce digital tickets, transport perks and stricter crowd control measures

Stokes calls recent months toughest phase, vows to rebuild England team

LONDON

Ben Stokes has described the last three months as the most challenging phase of his captaincy, following England's disappointing The Ashes campaign, while reaffirming his commitment to rebuild the team alongside coach Brendon McCullum.

England endured a tough tour of Australia, suffering a 4-1 defeat in the Ashes, prompting criticism over planning, selection and on-field performances. Despite the setback, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has backed Stokes, McCullum and managing director Rob Key to continue in their roles.

In an emotional message shared on social media, Stokes reflected on the pressures of leadership and the personal toll of the past few months. He described captaining England as the greatest honour of his career, but admitted the responsibility can be overwhelming at times.

"The last three months have without a doubt been the hardest period of my captaincy journey," Stokes said, adding that the experience has tested him in multiple ways. He acknowledged that setbacks are part of leadership and noted that every captain goes through similar phases during their career.

Stokes emphasised that the team has learnt valuable lessons from the Ashes defeat and is determined to move forward with renewed focus. He expressed confidence in the leadership group, highlighting the shared passion between himself, McCullum and Key to take the team in the right direction.

"We know we made mistakes along the way, but you learn more from failure than success," he said, underlining the importance of resilience and growth.

The England skipper also spoke about his enduring love for the game and his role, stating that he remains fully committed and motivated to lead the side.

He thanked fans for their continued support during a difficult period and promised to repay their faith with improved performances.

England will now turn their attention to the home summer, beginning with a Test series against New Zealand from June 4, where Stokes and his team will aim to mark a fresh start.

Uncapped Anushka Sharma earns maiden India call-up for SA T20s

NEW DELHI

Uncapped youngster Anushka Sharma has earned her maiden call-up to the Indian women's team for the upcoming five-match T20I series against South Africa, starting April 17. The 22-year-old's inclusion comes on the back of an impressive run in the Women's Premier League (WPL) 2026, where she represented Gujarat Giants after being signed for ₹45 lakh. Sharma made an immediate impact with the bat, showcasing composure and consistency that caught the selectors' attention. The series, which will be held across Durban, Johannesburg and Benoni, forms a crucial part of India's preparations for the upcoming ICC Women's T20 World Cup scheduled in the UK in June-July. Led by captain Harmanpreet Kaur, the squad blends experienced campaigners with emerging talent. Sharma had also featured in the India A squad during the recent Rising Stars Asia Cup in Bangkok, further strengthening her credentials for national selection. Her steady rise through the ranks reflects India's focus on building bench strength ahead of major international tournaments. From the squad that secured a 2-1 series win over Australia, players such as Sneha Rana, Amanjot Kaur, G Kamalini and Vaishnavi Sharma have been left out for the South Africa tour.

Sneha, Yashas seek exit from K'taka, request NOC to switch states

BENGALURU

Karnataka athletes Sneha SS and Yashas P have sought No Objection Certificates (NOCs) from the Karnataka State Athletics Association (KSAA) to represent other states, citing lack of support and exclusion from key development programmes.

In separate letters submitted to the association, both athletes expressed disappointment over being left out of the state government's Target Olympic Medal Scheme (TOPS), which aims to support elite sportspersons in their preparation for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. The scheme provides financial assistance of ₹10 lakh annually for three years to 60 selected athletes.

"Due to a lack of adequate support from my state, I would like to request a No Objection Certificate to compete representing another state," the athletes wrote in their respective communications.

Sneha, a 27-year-old sprinter, was part of the Indian 4x100m relay team that secured a silver medal at the Asian Athletics Championships last year. She has a personal best of 11.42 seconds in the 100m, recorded in 2023, and clocked 11.55 seconds in the previous season. Despite her achievements, she claimed her performances were overlooked in the selection process.

Echoing similar concerns, 24-year-old Yashas, one of India's promising 400m hurdlers, also expressed dissatisfaction. With a personal best of 49.22 seconds, he finished fifth at the 2022 Asian Games and is considered a strong contender in his discipline.

Both athletes alleged that the selection process for the scheme lacked transparency, claiming that some beneficiaries were chosen despite limited achievements, allegedly due to political influence. Sneha, in a statement to the media, described the situation as "deeply disappointing," questioning the criteria used for selection.

The development raises concerns over athlete support systems at the state level, particularly as India looks to strengthen its medal prospects for global competitions.

Mandhana steady at No.2, Harmanpreet climbs in ICC Women's T20 rankings

BENGALURU

India's Smriti Mandhana retained her No.2 position in the latest ICC Women's T20I batting rankings, while captain Harmanpreet Kaur moved up to 14th following consistent performances, according to the rankings released on Tuesday.

Mandhana continues to be India's highest-ranked batter in the shortest format, maintaining her place among the world's elite. She is joined in the top 10 by Shafali Verma, who held on to her sixth position with her aggressive style at the top of the order. Meanwhile, Jemimah Rodrigues remained just outside the top 10, placed joint 11th.

In the bowling rankings, all-rounder Deepti Sharma climbed one place to third, underlining her growing importance across formats. Fast bowler Renuka Singh Thakur retained her sixth position, continuing her consistent run in T20 internationals. However, seamer Arundhati Reddy slipped out of the top 10 to 11th.

Deepti also strengthened her standing among all-rounders, rising to No.3 in that category, reflecting her all-round contributions with both bat and ball.

Among international players, Australia's Georgia Voll broke into the top 10 batting rankings for the first time, marking a significant milestone in her career. New Zealand star Sophie Devine gained two places to reach 18th after scoring back-to-back half-centuries against South Africa.

BIG NAMES SET TO SKIP MAIDEN NATIONAL INDOOR CHAMPIONSHIPS IN BHUBANESWAR

BHUBANESWAR

The inaugural National Indoor Athletics Championships, set to begin at the Kalinga Indoor Stadium, are likely to witness a muted star presence, with several top Indian athletes opting to skip the marquee event. Despite the significance of the meet — the first-ever indoor national competition in India — the two-day event has failed to attract many leading names in track and field. Among the prominent athletes who have confirmed participation are Animesh Kujur, who will compete in the 60m, triple jump national record holder Praveen Chithravel, and high jumper Sarvesh Anil Kushare. A major reason cited for the absence of several elite athletes is the timing of the event, which comes just days after the World Indoor Championships held in Torun, Poland. Many athletes have already shifted focus to the outdoor season, with preparations underway for major competitions such as the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games qualifiers.

Sources indicate that the lack of direct qualification incentives and limited prize money have also contributed to the low turnout. "The tournament is neither a qualifying event for any major competition nor does it offer a significant prize purse," a leading athlete said on condition of anonymity, explaining the decision to prioritise upcoming outdoor events.

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